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OUT OF SOCIETY.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. PULLEYNE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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OUT OF SOCIETY.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER THREE YEARS.

THREE years have passed away. It is Summer, the end of the London season, and there is a croquet party under the cedars at Chesham Court, on the brilliant mossy sward.

The players are the men and women who, tired with their fashionable exertions and fashionable life in London, have come down to recruit their wasted health and strength in the sweet home parks and on the breezy slopes of Moorshire.

They are all our old acquaintances—

the Harringtons, the Joneses, Lord Arthur Trelawney, Rosamond Etheridge, and Catherine Hyde.

Those who were unwedded before are unwedded still. The flirtations and the dissipations have produced no apparent result ; the others being married, are at present in *statu quo*. The only new addition to the scene is the infant heir to the Chesham estates, who sits on his mother's lap, crowing with childish pleasure, as the pretty-coloured balls fly here and there over the bright green grass.

Beatrice looks proud and happy, as she watches, with all a mother's worship in her gentle face, his infantine delight ; but there is a sadness when that face is in repose, a look of pained anxiety in the sweet brown eyes, that tells, for all her glad maternity, the mother is *not* happy.

She looks older and slightly stouter than when we saw her last ; the cares of motherhood have subdued that girlish exuberance of spirits, that used at times to spoil the

dignity of Lady Slade, and cause a frown of annoyance to cross the face of her husband. She is quieter and more thoughtful in her movements, and her eyes have a half-weary, half-frightened expression in them, like those of a hunted deer, except when they are resting on the form of her infant boy. Then they light up with an infinite tenderness and beauty, and the mother's face shines with the shadow of that divine and holy love which was reflected in the features of the Blessed Mother Maid.

Beatrice Slade is not happy. Three years of married life have shown the hollowness of all earthly expectations that have not a heavenly foundation for their basis. She has discovered that riches and grandeur, fine houses and carriages, and silks and satins to wear, cannot make up the sum total of human happiness, when the possessor of them happens to have a heart and a soul.

She has discovered, poor little thing,

that there is something wanting ; something for which all her balls and her parties and her jewels cannot compensate ; without which all her dreams of earthly bliss are unsatisfactory and unreal.

The one thing wanting is love,—sweet tender human love ; the throbbing of some heart in unison with hers, the beating of some pulse responsive to her own.

When she woke to the full consciousness of her glorious heaven-given birthright ; when she passed from out her gentle girlish life into the dreamland of her new existence, she looked for that love which was her prerogative, her due, to him from whom she had a right to claim it.

And she found it was wanting ; she found, so far as love was concerned, she had wedded a marble statue ; that no word, no look, no fond entreating caresses, could melt the icicle she called her husband's heart. She saw, when too late, that the sacred name of wife was but a myth—a cipher, in her regard ; that into the inner

sanctuary of his soul—such a soul as it was—she could never penetrate ; the doors of his heart—if he had a heart at all—were locked for ever on Beatrice Slade ; and with the knowledge came a bitterness of anguish, an agony of regret, that for a time crushed the brave young spirit beneath its overwhelming force.

The trees of good and evil were free to her hand ; but she had tasted all the evil, with the full knowledge of the good ; and the woman—for woman she was now—sobbed out her sorrow and pain in the long long hours of the night, when the truth appeared before her with terrible reality, and her melancholy reflections ended in tears of unavailing regret.

It is a pity that the favoured inhabitants of society are not born without hearts at all ; they must be great nuisances to those who happen to possess them, till they grow hard and indifferent, like those of their neighbours.

Our poor Beatrice's heart was a terrible

nuisance to her at the commencement of her married life ; for, not only was she always bemoaning her husband's want of appreciation, and her own desire for sympathy, but it often made Sir Reginald very angry when she persisted on forcing it on his notice.

He fancied, at first, that she was discontented with her home in Moorshire, and took her up to London to reside ; then he bought her dresses and jewels, and all the nick-nacks that women love ; but still Beatrice's eyes were full of unshed tears, and she hung upon him in a way that was perfectly incomprehensible to the cool and calculating Sir Reginald Slade.

" I cannot tell what the deuce she wants," he said to his friend Trelawney ; " she has a splendid home, a box at the opera, and plenty to eat and drink. What the dickens can she want beside ?"

And Lord Arthur, who knew the world and women better than the astute Sir

Reginald, coolly replied, as he stroked his moustache, with a sneering smile,—

“Perhaps she would like a lover.”

“What the devil do you mean, man?” exclaimed Sir Reginald, livid with rage, as he turned on his friend.

“Don’t excite yourself, Slade,” calmly returned Arthur Trelawney; “no offence to Lady Slade. I was simply suggesting that you should do a little more of the married man, and stop at home with your wife sometimes.”

“What foolery you talk, Trelawney; Beatrice would be as sick of it as I should, if I did that. I’m always present at her balls and parties, and I go out with her everywhere I can. Do you think a fellow is to be tied to a woman’s apron-strings for ever?”

“Act as you please, my boy,” replied Lord Arthur, carelessly, puffing away at his cigar. “You ask for advice, and then won’t take it; what an ungrateful fellow you are, Slade. Try it on with my lady; I understand these soft little women

better than you do. It's a little way they have got."

"Curse their little ways! They are confoundedly uncomfortable, that's all I know," cried the Baronet. "That comes of marrying a country girl. If I had chosen a London woman, she would have been very different."

"It's a pity you didn't, since that is your opinion," replied Lord Arthur, tossing his cigar out of the club window.

The only result of this conversation was, that Sir Reginald went home in a worse temper than usual, and when Beatrice met him with her sad reproachful eyes, swore at her and bullied her for making such a fool of herself as to let the world fancy she was unhappy.

Poor Beatrice trembled, and protested that she was very happy indeed, and had nothing on earth to desire, except his kindness.

"Am I not kind to you, Lady Slade?" exclaimed her husband, peremptorily.

“Oh, yes, dear Reginald ; but——”

“But what, madam ?”

The poor foolish heart could bear no more ; tears were her only reply.

“I hope I shall hear no more of this,” replied Sir Reginald, angrily. “If you have any cause for complaint, let me know what it is ; but do not humiliate me in the eyes of society by such stupid insane behaviour.”

And Beatrice promised she would never offend again, and fancied herself really in the wrong for expecting her husband to be any different from what he was. She grew older and wiser in time, and the smiles came back to her lips and eyes ; but her heart and her husband’s grew wider apart with every change of the moon.

It was not to be expected that with an organisation so loving and tender as Beatrice Slade’s, the little stream of human affection that gushed out of the well-springs of her womanly nature, should be

turned aside, or cease to flow, without some effort to prolong its course.

Thwarted in her tenderest feelings, the timid soul turned to her sister Catherine, for the love and sympathy denied her by her husband. On that dear sister she lavished all the wealth of affection of which she found herself so lately possessed ; she sought by every means in her power to promote Catherine's happiness and welfare, and poured into her ear the earlier sorrows of her married life ; but with what result ? Catherine Hyde, absorbed in the performances of the religious duties to which she had given herself up, since the advent of the Rev. Adrian Hope, looked upon all outward demonstrations of earthly affection as sinful and unnecessary. Cold and pure as the very snow, the proud girl resisted all Beatrice's efforts to win her love, and shut herself up in her castle of pride and virtue, from whose adamant walls the arrows of affection fell harmless and blunted.

If Beatrice said she suffered, Catherine retorted, "suffering was blessed and sent by God."

If Beatrice said she was unhappy, Catherine replied, "It was wrong to be so, only sin should cause unhappiness."

If Beatrice said she longed for a little love, Catherine would answer, "Love God and you will have more than sufficient."

Beatrice could never make her sister understand the trifles that fretted her daily life. Catherine thought her wicked to indulge such morbid imaginations, and openly declared her absence of sympathy with such petty griefs. And so the sister's heart was shut against the desolate little wife, closed round with a barrier of ascetic virtue, that looked upon all expressions of human tenderness as so many obstacles to the spiritual life, and Beatrice turned away heartsick and weary to her daily round of fashionable dissipation, striving to find in the follies and vanities of the world the rest her soul so much desired.

The only being who really seemed to love her was Rosamond Etheridge: but she was such a girl, there could be no very great fellowship between the gentle patrician lady and her blunt outspoken protégé, and without unity of feeling there can be no real love. So Beatrice's life grew sadder and darker, and the heart that was laden with gold and jewels weighed heavily under its splendid bondage, till one day the merciful God, who reads all the thoughts and feelings of men, took pity on His wounded and suffering creature, and *sent her a little child*.

Oh, how the bells rang out in glad triumphant peals, and then the sun shone brighter, and the birds sang sweeter, and life was life again in all its glad and golden promise—no more weeping—no more sighs; a cherub had come down from heaven to console her with its beauty and its love, and the mother's heart was full of thankfulness to God.

Oh, how she loved her child! how all the pent-up feelings of her nature gushed

out, in fond profusion, over the infant's cot; and then, as the months and years went by, and the baby grew into a sweet and gracious child, Beatrice fancied earth could hold no greater happiness than the kisses from baby's lips, the smiles from baby's eyes; little she cared for the coldness of husband or sister now, the whole of her concentrated affection was lavished on her boy—so long as baby was happy, the mother was happy too.

There is no such thing as unmixed pleasure in the world,—as the years flew on, Lady Slade had fresh cause given her for anxiety and consternation.

Sir Reginald, from the passive indifference, with which he treated his wife during the first year of their marriage, became at times violent and rude in the extreme; giving way to fits of excessive passion and fury, driving the servants and all before him. He would frequently behave as if under the influence of intoxicating liquors, and at such times was extra-

vagant and reckless, throwing his money away in all directions, and purchasing everything he took a fancy to. At other times he had hours of depression and melancholy, from which his best friends could with difficulty arouse him; it was then he was most tender and courteous to his wife, consulting her pleasure in everything before his own. At these times there seemed nothing he could not lavish upon Beatrice and the child, while to others he was niggardly and parsimonious.

Beatrice became aware that he was spending large sums of money on the turf, in backing his own and his friends' horses, and attributed with some reason the different phases of Sir Reginald's temper to his gains and losses on these animals. She knew there was quite sufficient out of their large income to justify a reasonable amount being wasted on Sir Reginald's pet amusement, and in her innocence she firmly believed that what he lost on one race, he would win on another; however, there was

no apparent reason why he should fly into such dreadful tempers, when she often heard him say he had made a capital purse on the last race.

At times she wondered why he had married her, he was so cold, so indifferent; so utterly changed. Never the most demonstrative of lovers, latterly he had treated her with the most flagrant neglect, and his fits of repentance were as transitory as his kindness.

Of his heir, Sir Reginald was undoubtedly very proud, and for a while after the birth of the child, Beatrice fancied they were all going to be as happy as she deemed herself in her early marriage days. But gradually Sir Reginald relapsed into his old indifferent manner, broken only by the spasmodic hours of foolish fondness.

Lady Slade bore all these changes of temperament with patience and submission, quite contented, so that her boy was admired, to have him loved only by herself;

in fact I believe she was jealous of others, lest they should win any part of his affection from her.

She liked his father to pet and praise the child ; she liked her friends to declare there never was such a baby seen before ; but his kisses, his caresses, his infantile prattle, all these the fond mother coveted for herself ; jealously watching every token of her boy's regard for another. He was truly a noble child, fair, with the light curly hair, and large blue eyes of his father, but with his mother's smile, his mother's sweet ingenuous look on his handsome Saxon face.

Well he repaid her affection, from the moment when the small soft face grew radiant with the intelligence of recognition, up to the present time, when the child's expressive glances were ever turned towards his mother, the love between them grew stronger and stronger, till he could scarcely bear to be parted from her side.

The claims of society—the duties of hospitality, often prevented Lady Slade

being with her boy as much as she could have wished, but there was never a spare moment when the devoted mother did not fly to the nursery to enjoy the embraces of her child, the greatest happiness she had ever known.

Francis St. Aubyn de Montmorency Slade bid fair to be thoroughly spoiled, and yet, as if in contradiction to all established theories, the child was not spoiled at all. With his nurses or his father he behaved as well as a baby of two years old could behave. It was only when his mother left him that the blue eyes filled with tears and the little lips quivered and trembled with grief. Beatrice had insisted on calling him "Francis," his father wished his first name to be "Hotspur," after a horse that had won that year's race, but Beatrice pleaded for Francis, and Francis he was accordingly.

"Francis was my dear father's name," she said to Mrs. Stanley Harrington, who stood sponsor; "besides, I could not bear the idea of my child not having one

Christian name, the others are heathenish enough."

Mrs. Harrington laughed. "I had no idea you were so silly, Beatrice ; that speech is worthy of your sister. Don't you know, my dear, *Christian* names went out with the last generation. Had I been blessed or cursed with children, I suppose they would have been called Marmion, or Chester, or some such appropriate designation, and quite proper too, when one's washerwoman calls her dirty brats by the euphonious patronymics of 'Araminta' or 'Victoria,' it is high time polite society sought some other mode of expression. Fancy the heir of the Harringtons a vulgar Jack or Bill ;" and the little lady shrugged her shoulders with the most expressive *moué*.

Beatrice kissed her baby's dimpled shoulders and smiled. "You don't know what you will do till you have one," she said, forgetting that Mrs. Harrington had been married several years.

“ I suppose not, but as I never shall have one I don’t wish to know. Poor Stanley will never be blessed with an heir. I am not sure but it’s a wise dispensation of Providence ; we should have nothing to leave it, so we are better without.”

Lady Slade looked at her with infinite tenderness and compassion in her soft dark eyes, her heart was full of pity for the childless lady. It seemed the most terrible misfortune to her not to have a child.

“ Poor Mrs. Harrington !” she murmured, half to herself, as she clasped her treasure nearer to her breast.

Mrs. Harrington burst into a merry fit of laughter.

“ For mercy’s sake don’t pity me,” she cried, “ it’s too much of a joke. Do I look like a woman who wanted children ? Why, I should be always wishing them out of the way, and as for Stanley he would be like a bear with a doll, and most likely crush it to death in his huge embrace. No, no, that special Power who looks to these things has

seen it was better to leave me without. I wouldn't renounce my rides and my drives for all the babies in the world, my godson is quite sufficient for me."

Beatrice could not help smiling at her friend's merry sally, but she considered Mrs. Harrington an object of compassion from that day forth.

The baby's great playmate was Rosamond Etheridge. She would spend days with him whenever the family were at the Court, romping and playing in the sweet green fields, or under the shade of the trees in the park. The child soon learnt to look with delight to her coming, and would hold out his arms to "Osie" almost as fondly as he would to his mother.

Rosamond Etheridge was, like the rest of our acquaintances, three years older than when we last saw her, and the three years of *her* life had made the most palpable difference. Instead of an unsophisticated blushing school-girl, she was now a tall elegant

young lady of nineteen, with a figure and bust rather too strongly developed for a modest young woman (so Miss Archer said), but nevertheless not objected to by any of her male acquaintances. She had been taken up to London by Lady Slade, had made her curtsy to the queen, and run the gauntlet of a whole season in town. She had plunged head over heels into the ocean of that society of which her mother was always talking, but of which even her regretted barrack life had only given her a glimpse.

Mrs. Etheridge was overjoyed "to think," as she said, "at last, that after all her struggles and trials, Rosamond not only was 'In Society,' but liked it too."

The poor little woman did not know when she had done enough. Every penny she could beg or borrow she scraped up for her child; she stinted herself of common necessities to get Rosamond dress; she plotted, schemed, and contrived, and put off her creditors from day to day, so that Rosa-

mond should be able to make a becoming appearance among her grand acquaintances.

Rosamond scolded and expostulated, but she took the things, nevertheless, and enjoyed herself when away from Moorshire as if there was no poor mother wearing her heart out for her at home, and striving all she knew to keep the wolf from the door.

How can we blame her? Rosamond was young and foolish, and life—such a pleasant life too—had only just commenced for her. Shall we not rather condemn the silly woman at home, who first fostered the idea in her daughter's mind, and then found her the means to carry it out? Alas! no, let us pity them both. The fault was not theirs, but in the Society that demands such worship from its votaries, that rides Juggernaut-like over the hearts of its victims. They are but types of a class. Preachers may preach and satirists condemn, but it will be the same to the end of time.

Meanwhile, the years went on, and the poor captain got his promotion at last, and

this made things more pleasant for a time. Still Fern Cottage remained one vast sham, respectability, like the ferns from which it took its name, being *outside* the door. Inside was lying, chicanery, and deceit, from the unpaid washerwoman's bills to the gilt on Mrs. Etheridge's chain.

Rosamond groaned and agonized in spirit many a day as she thought of the miserable subterfuges to which they were reduced in order to hold their own in society, but what could she do? How could she alter it?

She had several offers of marriage, some of them most excellent, but none of them from men whom she felt she could love; and, not even for her mother, would Rosamond Etheridge sell her heart.

She saw girls doing it every day of her life. She saw matches made up, in which the actors were bought and sold as really as anything else in the world. Women breaking their hearts and those of their lovers for the sake of a finer establishment than their neighbours. Men old enough to be

grandfathers wedding some child they had purchased with a coronet. She saw youths, in whose veins the hot blood of life ran swift and strong, in whose breasts the noblest aspirations of mankind struggled for freedom, promising to love and cherish women whose very age gave the lie to their vows, but without whose money they could never get into society. And this in a country that calls itself Christian, that sends missionaries to China, and lowers its shocked eyes at the mention of the harems of the Turks.

Rosamond turned sick, and shuddered as she wondered whether she could ever be like the women she met in the world of fashion—ever come to think and act as they did; for besides the sin, she saw the consequences; besides the crime, she saw the reward—broken hearts and dishonoured names; children left without a mother; and a wasted lifetime spent in drunkenness and vice. There was little fear, for the girl's frank dauntless nature steered her clear of

these dangerous shoals ; and she had, besides, another reason for avoiding the quicksands of the matrimonial sea.

Rosamond's three years' acquaintance with polite society had toned down much of the roughness and bluntness that had hitherto spoiled her character. She learned to control her blushes, and hesitated no longer when suddenly addressed. She had also learned to be quieter and more lady-like in her movements, and to think twice before broaching her sometimes unpleasant opinions ; but she was still the same merry fearless girl, with the honest loving heart, and hatred of deception, that she had in the days when she was, so to speak, "Out of Society." Her short acquaintance with the world had softened, without destroying, her character. The wild little lioness was tamed and subdued, but the nature was that of a lioness still.

Catherine Hyde, the peerless imperial Catherine, was, to the astonishment of all her acquaintances, neither married nor en-

gaged. As Maria Jones had prophesied, all London was at her feet during her first season ; at the end of the year, she had received no less than three of the best offers (one from the eldest son of a duke) that were to be had for love or money ; it was love certainly in her case, for it was well known in the upper circles that the beautiful sister of Lady Slade had nothing but what that sister gave her ; but men will go mad over a pretty face, whether it be in or out of society, and such men would have given all they possessed to see a woman like Catherine Hyde at the head of their table. The proud beauty received their offers, as she did their homage—with haughty indifference ; not one atom of encouragement did they ever receive from her. As far above them as the stars in heaven, she was as distant and unattainable ; as pure and as perfect as a statue, she was as cold and stony to their love. Men came at last to swear she had no heart, and women called her the “Marble Maiden.” Catherine,

supremely indifferent to both, laughed at their taunts as she did at their adoration.

There was only one point on which Catherine Hyde was vulnerable—religion. Had she been a Roman Catholic, she certainly would have become a nun ; but only being an Anglican, her religious fervour had not carried her to the length of giving up her beautiful costumes for the coarse grey cloaks in which Jane Jones and Miss Sarah Archer delighted to disfigure themselves.

From the moment when the Rev. Adrian Hope first appeared as the new Incumbent of "All Saints," (the Rector dying shortly after his arrival), Catherine Hyde went in strongly for devoteeism ; in fact, that unconscious young minister simply turned the heads of all his women kind, after he had turned their bodies out of doors. By turning them out, I mean he made a clean sweep of all the female element in the sanctuary and choir, and drove them to their proper places in the benches.. Heedless of black looks and

blackier words, he insisted on the train of acolytes (the fair Sarah at their head) abandoning at once and for ever, their gentle ministrations at the altar : " he would have none but men about him," he said. Sarah revolted! Like her famous namesake, she was for ruling both church and state. She instigated Maria and Jane to persuade their father to have the Rev. Adrian removed. Adrian stood his ground, and insisted on having *them* removed.

Plantagenet Jones, bothered out of his life by disputes, in which he took little or no interest, endeavoured to steer a middle course ; and proposed the clergyman keeping the sanctuary, and the women the choir. The young minister was firm : unless he had the whole of the church to himself, he would resign the living : and he got his way. His earnest manner, his impressive sermons, his gentle kindness to the poor, and his powerful denunciations of the vices and follies of the rich, all told on an impressionable congregation, who had been

hitherto accustomed to men of very mediocre merit. The women, utterly routed, made a feint of submission in their newly-awakened anxiety to see what he would do next.

He repaid them for their obedience by giving them extra services and extra sermons; and introduced the practice of auricular confession, to the secret dislike of the men, but to the infinite delight of his female congregation; from that moment he was their idol, and the fair sex to a woman (Miss Sarah, as usual, at their head,) went over to the enemy.

“All Saints’” became more fashionable than ever; people flocked from all quarters to hear the wonderful new preacher, and the evening services were quite the rage—with a certain set, of course; the other side, the Low church party, denounced his practices as Popish and blasphemous, and prophesied no end of judgments to fall on his devoted head.

The Rev. Adrian Hope cared very little

for the opinion of either his friends or his enemies ; firm in his own consciousness of right doing, he held his way—intoning his services, preaching his sermons, visiting his sick and poor, all with one object—the salvation of souls. No earthly consideration, no worldly motive, ever entered into the actions of Adrian Hope ; he had but one thought—God ; for Him and His honour and glory, Adrian alone lived and breathed.

Though, as was customary in the good city of Rubestown, hospitality was offered him at all the best houses in the place, the Rev. Adrian Hope led almost the life of a recluse, seldom going out to dinner or other parties, and rarely visiting his rich parishioners. It was rumoured when he first came to Rubestown, that, being related to the Duke of A——, he was certain to marry soon, and well ; rumour even pointed out the gentle Jane Jones as his future bride. Rumour was wrong, as she often is. Three years had passed away, and the Rev. Adrian Hope was still unmarried, and likely

to remain so ; as he publicly avowed his belief in the celibacy of the clergy. Another Popish doctrine, but one his fair adorers did not seek to dissuade him from ; each hoping her own particular attractions would overcome his scruples in time ; or fearing, should he change his mind, she might not be the object of his selection.

CHAPTER II.

“AND LOVE TOOK UP THE GLASS OF TIME.”

A GROUP of men stood talking under the trees. Sir Reginald Slade, Captain Vivian, Mr. Plantagenet Jones, and several others.

Plantagenet Jones was in a great state of excitement. “I was never more astonished in my life,” he was saying, “’pon honour, Sir Reginald—no. I was just having a chat with my friend, the Earl of Marchmont, capital fellow that—when who should come in but a deputation, headed by Smith—you know Smith, the brewer—influential man, and so forth,—and hang me if they didn’t ask me to stand for Rubes-

town, at the coming election—me, of all people in the world,” and the little man held out both his hands, in humble depreciation of his own work.

“And what better man could be found?” cried Sir Reginald warmly, slapping him on the back.

“Or one more fitted to represent the Borough,” chimed in Lord Arthur Trelawney, with a bow and smile.

“But God bless my soul, Sir, I know nothing of politics, I’m not a politician,” exclaimed Plantagenet, glowing with excitement and conscious pride. “Why they should come to me, when so many abler men are to be had, passes my comprehension.”

“Nonsense, my good fellow, you will have to oblige them,” cried the Baronet. “No man has a greater right. It does Rubestown credit to have selected as her candidate the man who has made her what she is: shake hands, Jones; I congratulate you, old boy. You will be returned

of course, the first member for the Borough."

Plantagenet smiled benignly.

"I suppose they could not well do less. I fancy this humble individual has done his share for the welfare of the town, though I never expected it would be appreciated in such a way. As for being returned, that's quite another pair of boots. I am not so sanguine about it as you are."

"Returned ! you're certain to be returned. Why Harrington and you will have all the votes between you, High Church and Low Church, and both Conservatives."

"There's a cad of a Liberal going to put up," remarked Plantagenet, rubbing his ear with an air of perplexity ; "these fellows are the very devil to canvass—stick at nothing, you know ; I'm not sure how I shall get on with him."

"Surely, Mr. Jones, you would not class yourself in the same category with a *cad*," interrupted Lord Arthur, smiling at Captain Vivian.

"Oh, no, thertainly not," assented that gallant officer.

"Well, I flatter myself I am a little above that," cried the delighted *parvenu*, bowing to the implied compliment; "but gentlemen, what is a fellow to do? These rascals come down and get the ear of the people, with their confounded cant about reform and suffrages, and equal rights, and by God, sir, they carry all before them before you know what's what;" and Plantagenet wiped his shiny forehead, moist with the anticipation of the coming contest.

"Who the devil cares about the lower orders?" cried Sir Reginald Slade, snapping his fingers at some imaginary personage of that much abused confraternity. "The principal people in Rubestown are Conservative to a man; they'll carry you through, never fear. I suppose you have got good interest at your back, eh?"—

"The best in the place. I tried all I could to get out of the thing, but they

wouldn't hear of it; they have pledged themselves to return me if I'll only stand. My friend the Duke of A——will give me his most liberal support."

"Then, my good fellow, your election is secure," said Lord Arthur; "allow me to wish you joy of your seat in anticipation."

"What is this about an election?" exclaimed Mrs. Stanley Harrington, who, the game being finished, came tripping up to where the men were standing, attired in the daintiest of croquet costumes; "who is going to be elected?"

"Mrs. Harrington, allow me to introduce to you, Plantagenet Jones, Esq. M.P., member for the most worshipful Borough of Rubestown," cried Lord Arthur with mock courtesy.

"Indeed, Mr. Jones; I am surprised and delighted," and the little lady held out her hand with a winning smile.

"Madam, my fellow citizens have done me the honour to ask me to represent them in Parliament, and our friends here have

elected me already," explained the banker, bowing to the lady, with one hand upon his heart. "It is a dignity I do not deserve."

"Oh, nonsense, Mr. Jones, you depreciate your merits. Stanley! what do you think? Mr. Jones is to stand for the Borough."

"So I heard this morning," remarked the indolent Stanley, slowly emerging from a nook where he had been lying, half asleep in the sun. "Wish you joy, Jones, my boy, you will find it the awfulest bore in the world."

"Not half so bad as widing school," remarked the Plunger, still intent on his one idea.

"Vivian, dear boy, such things are a matter of sentiment," replied Stanley Harrington, yawning, and stretching his legs. "I know nothing half so bad as being kept out of bed."

"Harrington, you are a disgrace to the House," laughed Lord Arthur. "Jones

will be an ornament, we shall have Plantagenet's speeches copied in all the papers, and privately printed for the edification of all his friends and admirers."

"Oh, Lord Arthur," simpered the millionaire.

"Fact, I assure you. What the country has been about, to do without you so long I don't know. Ladies"—(as attracted by the laughter, they came up one by one)—"we are desirous of securing your votes and interest for your future member, Mr. Plantagenet Jones; we hope you will aid us to the utmost of your power, by helping us to canvass—your fair presence,—your sweet charms—will—must——"

"Lord Arthur, do be quiet, chaffing like that," exclaimed Maria, giggling—"what nonsense you do talk: fancy papa an M.P."

"It is no nonsense at all, Miss Jones, it is a positive fact; your respected papa is as much an M.P. in prospective as is our graceful Stanley here."

"Goodness gracious! you don't say so. Jane, we must get into the lady's gallery and hear papa make his maiden speech—won't it be fun?"

"It will be much greater fun going round to canvass," cried Rosamond Etheridge; "of course you will go, Maria; Mrs. Harrington always does."

"If I did not, Stanley would never be returned," said the brunette, with an expressive shrug of her pretty shoulders; "he is too lazy to ask for his own votes."

"Don't tell fibs of your husband, Isabel. Good people, she does it because she likes it. You have no idea what pretty things——"

"Bribery and corruption!" exclaimed Sir Reginald Slade.

"It is lawful to take the spoils of the Philistines," sententiously remarked Lord Arthur Trelawney.

"Where's Miss Hyde? Here's Trelawney quoting scripture!" shouted Stanley Harrington. "Will some one be kind

enough to fetch Miss Hyde, or a policeman, or somebody ?”

“ Will some one hold Harrington ?” cried Lord Arthur, in mock alarm ; “ he will have a fit through over-exerting himself, if they don’t.”

“ I am quite sure if I had Mrs. Harrington to canvass for me, my election would be secure,” said Plantagenet Jones, bowing profoundly to that lady. “ At all events, she is on our side.”

“ And will put in a word for you, if you are good, when I look up Stanley’s people.”

“ By Jove, Plantagenet, but you are in luck !” exclaimed Sir Reginald, excitedly. “ Gad, but I’ve a mind to put up for the place myself, if I thought Mrs. Harrington would advocate my cause.”

“ Mrs. Harrington would do nothing of the sort”—a slight flush on her cheek as she spoke ; “ you would be worse than Stanley, and he is bad enough for anything.” She glanced up at him, speaking

quickly, decisively ; one little foot, cased in its perfect *bottine*, resting on the gnarled roots of the oak under whose shade they stood.

Sir Reginald bit his lips and frowned slightly.

“ There Slade, you’re floored,” laughed Captain Vivian. “ It’s no use your twying that on, my boy.”

As Lord Arthur had remarked some years before to Catherine Hyde, Captain Vivian’s lisp was chiefly assumed ; he could pronounce his words as well as any one when he chose, or forgot.

“ What says Miss Hyde ?” cried Lord Arthur, as the beauty came languidly across the velvet sward, trailing her mallet behind her. “ Will you descend to earth for a moment, Miss Hyde, and give us poor mortals the benefit of your advice ? Our friend Jones is to stand for the borough. Will you bestow on him your favour and interest ?”

“ Mr. Jones always has had my favour

and interest," replied Catherine, with an air of surprise ; " surely he does not require to question it now."

" The devil's in the fellow ; he's in luck all round !" cried Sir Reginald. " Tell us your secret, Jones ; how do you manage to get all the women on your side ?"

Plantagenet Jones smiled with gratified vanity.

" I wish I could believe they were all on my side," glancing at Catherine Hyde. " I fear that is more than I dare to hope."

Catherine had seated herself on a garden chair, which one of the men had brought her. Plantagenet Jones planted himself by her side.

" We want you to help us to canvass, Miss Hyde," said Mrs. Harrington, who preferred standing, as it showed both her dress and figure to more advantage.

" Canvass what ?"

" Why the borough, to be sure," laughed Maria Jones ; " to go about asking for votes."

“Oh, no! really, I——”

“Oh do, Catherine; there’s a darling!”

“Oh, no!” repeated she, shrinking back; I did not understand you at first. Indeed, I could not; you really must excuse me.”

“We can take no excuse, Miss Hyde,” broke in Stanley Harrington. “Only think of Plantagenet Jones; why, you would be the making of him.”

“No, no!” reiterated Catherine, a look of intense annoyance on her face. “I should be quite out of my element; I should not know what to say.”

“Look charming, as you always do, and you need not say anything; at all events, Miss Hyde, you must allow me to be your partner in the next game of croquet; I see they are forming sides. Allow me to choose your colours for you—blue, the Conservative colour, of course.”

“I thought orange was the Conservative colour,” remarked Maria.

“Not in this part of the world, my dear; it is, I believe, in the South of England.”

Catherine pleaded that she was tired—that she could not play sufficiently well ; but the gallant banker, growing bold under the honours that were falling thick upon him, would take no refusal, and the proud beauty was obliged to give her reluctant consent.

“ I am certain to lose,” she said coldly, as they took their places.

“ What matters, so long as I win !” cried Plantagenet, dancing round her.

“ But you won’t ; I am always unlucky.”

“ Well, then, we shall lose together,” replied he, presently ; “ winner or loser, you are still my partner.”

“ I do not see the advantage. There ! that is the first false stroke ! the ball has gone outside the hoop.”

“ Never mind ; I can croquet you through,” replied Plantagenet, suiting the action to the word, and pirouetting round his mallet with the agility of a dancing-master.

They continued in this manner for a

while ; Catherine persistently playing wrongly, and her companion as persistently putting her right ; till, at last, she left him all the work to do, and walked leisurely by his side, chatting graciously—for Catherine could be very gracious if she chose, and was secretly amused at the very open attentions of her ancient admirer.

“ There, I’m a rover !” she cried, as Captain Vivian, in close attendance on his buxom Maria, croqueted away Catherine’s ball. “ Mr. Jones, what will you do now ? You will have to follow me.”

“ I would follow you all the world over !” exclaimed Plantagenet ardently, trying to look sentimental, a *rôle* in which he signally failed ; for Catherine, after her first look of proud surprise, broke into a peal of merry laughter.

“ Don’t be so silly !” she cried.

“ What do you mean by silly ?” he asked, in an aggrieved tone, hurt by her merriment. “ Do you consider a man to blame for wishing to devote himself to your service ?”

The expression of tender passion that he assumed was so unsuited to his round jovial face, that Catherine, struck by the comicality of the whole affair, laughed more heartily than ever.

Why is it that men and women, when they get into years, cannot make love without imitating the sentimentality of boys and girls? The ardent glances, the passionate looks, that sit so well on pretty youthful faces, that shine so tenderly out of young bright orbs, are utterly inconsistent and out of place when the forehead is covered with wrinkles, and crows-feet pucker the corners of the eyes.

Do not imagine I wish to insinuate it is only boys and girls that can love. I know for a fact that some of the deepest and strongest passions of the human heart have never been stirred till the hearts that felt them have been long past their prime.

There is a power of love in middle age to which the stormy effervescences of youth are as the foam of the sea compared with

the depth and intensity of the water below; but as a rule the men and women, who love with such concentration and strength, are not those who make themselves ridiculous by aping the manners and absurdities of an earlier age.

Catherine Hyde, despite her desire to be serious, could not suppress her feelings of amusement.

Whatever did the old fool mean? Surely he was not thinking of making love to her, with thirty years difference between their ages.

She had known him from childhood as the father of her schoolfellows, Maria and Jane. She had always looked up to him as a good-tempered old foggy, whose kindness of heart and plentiful money bags atoned in a great measure for his undoubted vulgarity. His intense *parvenuism*, his toadyism of dukes and earls, his pride of pocket, grated terribly on the girl's sensitive nerves, and she shrank and blushed at his coarse speeches, as much as she would have done

had he been a relative of her own ; but he had been invariably kind to her and her sister, when they had few to show them kindness, and, like Beatrice, she was too well-bred a gentlewoman to cast aside the ladder that had helped them to fortune.

Catherine always resented any attempt to turn the banker or his family into ridicule, and consoled herself by the reflection that persons both of rank and position courted the monarch of Moorshire as if he had been born of their order. She saw men, whose ancestry was the noblest in the land, hanging and fawning upon him, and calling him their "dear friend Jones." She saw women, whose blood was as blue as that of a Spanish Hidalgo, smile their sweetest smiles when the *parvenu* passed their way. She scorned them and pitied him. Contemptuous as he was, he was not so vile as they.

But as the banker was now making himself ridiculous, Catherine Hyde felt she must put a stop to his pretensions, or he would

draw some of the ridicule upon herself. So the next tender speech he made, she flashed upon him one of her haughty scornful glances, under which Plantagenet shrank like a snail into its shell.

"Don't look so cross, Miss Catherine," he cried, with a nervous attempt at a smile. "Cannot you forgive an old foggy for making you pretty speeches?"

Though he called himself an "old foggy" he did not think he was one.

"I dislike what you call pretty speeches," she said, coldly; "I do not understand them."

It was not easy to put Plantagenet down when he had once made up his mind to a thing; he quickly recovered his equanimity.

"You should not look so bewitching then, you would make an old man young to look at you; you know you would."

Catherine had to bite her lips to prevent a smile, but she determined to be more reserved for the future with the absurd old banker, so she finished her game, with her usual languid indifferent air, conversing

more with her opponents than with her partner. They had approached the last hoop, and for a moment, surprised into interest, she stood watching the excited players fighting for the game. It was her turn to make a stroke, and Mr. Jones was directing her how to do so to the best advantage, when, to his astonishment, the mallet fell from her trembling fingers, and she stopped flushing deeply with some hidden emotion. He had hardly time to notice her when he was called on as her partner to make his play, and eager to win if he could, he forgot for the moment Catherine Hyde and her sudden agitation. When he turned she was gone, and up the broad chestnut avenue, with the sunlight falling on his pale ascetic face, there came the young Rector of "All Saints'," the Rev. Adrian Hope.

Adrian made his way to where, under the shade of a large cedar, Lady Slade was sitting, the baby Francis on her lap. The child held out its arms with a crow of joy

directly Mr. Hope appeared, and the young minister took him from his mother and kissed his fair bright face.

"I am an intruder, I fear, Lady Slade," he said, in answer to her surprised salutation; "it is not often I venture into such festive gatherings."

"Indeed you do not," replied Beatrice. "To what am I indebted for this unexpected pleasure?"

"Only a mission of charity, a little matter for which I am anxious to secure your ladyship's interest. I had no idea you had a party."

"There are only a few friends, all people whom you know. You will stay now you are here?" questioned Beatrice, eagerly.

"Till I have accomplished my mission, certainly," smiled Adrian. "Having ventured into the enemy's camp, I am not going to beat an untimely retreat, besides, I have an ally here," pointing to the child.

"Put Francis down, Mr. Hope, he will only teaze you," said the young mother.

"Allow me to offer you some refreshment," motioning to the footman in attendance.

"Thank you, I will take an ice," replied Adrian, declining the proffered wine; "and as for Francis, he will not tease me at all, will you, my little man?" as the baby clung persistently round his neck, and endeavoured to climb on to his shoulder.

"Will Baby come to me?" ventured Mrs. Etheridge, who was sitting near Lady Slade, holding out her arms to the child.

Baby wouldn't, but kicked and wriggled when anyone approached him, and held all the tighter to the Rector's collar.

"You must let him alone, Mrs. Etheridge," said Adrian, smiling, "he has placed himself under the protection of the Church."

He put the child on his knee while he went through the difficult operation of eating an ice without having it upset on to his coat by the sturdy legs of the youthful heir.

"And now for my errand," he said, as

plate and spoon were at last safely deposited on the footman's tray.

"Last evening, Lady Slade, a poor woman, weary and footsore, solicited alms at the Rectory door. She has no friends in Rubestown, and what is far worse, no money. She has travelled all the way from Wales, I believe. What she wants in this part of the world I cannot exactly make out; she seems desirous only of stopping a day or two in the town, and then making her way home. It is against my rule, you know," he added, blushing slightly, "to receive females into the Rectory, and I do not know any one who would take her in for charity's sake, except such as are too poor to afford it. I thought I might venture to ask your ladyship——"

"To have her here! Oh, yes, certainly," cried Beatrice. "I will order arrangements to be made at once, she can sleep in the servants' apartments."

"Pardon me, Lady Slade," interrupted Adrian, smiling at her impetuosity. "I

fancy that would scarcely be the thing. I do not think Sir Reginald would approve of our foistering a tramp on him in this manner."

"What am I to do, then?" asked the bewildered Beatrice; "I thought you proposed——"

"That you should help me, truly, but not that a strange woman should become an inmate of your house. You will be robbed and murdered some day, Lady Slade, if you shelter all the vagrants that you hear about; you allow your heart to run away with your head, my daughter."

He spoke gravely, but there was a kind approving smile in his dark fathomless eyes.

"There is little fear of that," laughed Lady Slade; "but what do you wish me to do?"

"Help me with a little money," he said, with a flush on his pale face; "my purse is always at its lowest ebb; but I can

easily find the woman lodgings, if I have the means of paying for them."

"Certainly I will, and gladly too."

"Let me assist too, please," said a soft voice behind his chair. Turning, he beheld Catherine Hyde, her fair face beaming with gentle entreaty.

"Of course, my child," he said, his eyes flashing for a moment with delight.

Catherine looked overjoyed.

"It is no affair of yours, Catherine," said Lady Slade, half laughing—half annoyed. "Mr. Hope asked me, not you—go back to your croquet."

"Es, go back to oo cokie," cried baby Francis, trying to push Catherine away.

"Don't be rude, Francis, let Auntie Catherine alone," said his mother, reprovingly. "Mr. Hope, you must not depart from your word, you must take this money from me," and she placed her purse in Adrian's hands.

"I will take from you both," he replied, smiling, holding out his hand for Catherine's

donation ; "see, I am doubly fortunate now. Thank you, Lady Slade—thank you, Miss Hyde. I knew I should not come pleading in vain."

"Go back to oo cokee," repeated the voice of the little child.

"I shall do nothing of the sort, Master Francis," laughed his aunt, as she seated herself in her garden chair. "I shall stop here, and have you sent away."

"Me—ont—doh," retorted Francis from his position of vantage, holding like a rock to Mr. Hope's coat.

"I am tired of playing," said Catherine to Adrian. "It is a stupid game. I do not think I care for it at all."

"It is not an amusement I should have thought likely to suit you," remarked the young minister.

"Do you condemn it then, Mr. Hope?" questioned Lady Slade.

"I, no, God forbid. It is one of those innocent games that are open to all. I scarcely know why, I fancied it not suited

to Miss Hyde, perhaps because I have so seldom seen you out of the church," he added, turning to Catherine.

"I am more at home there," she murmured softly.

"I know you are," he replied, in the same undertone. "Possibly I did not like to see you out of your accustomed place."

Was it a pang of jealous pain that at that moment crossed Adrian Hope's heart, as his eyes fell on the handsome well-dressed men, who were gathered together on the velvet lawn.

It was the first time he had ever seen the woman, (whom he did not disguise, from himself was his favourite disciple), in the society of men of her own order, and the fact that she was daily associating with them, forced itself on his mind with startling consciousness; he had, as he himself observed, scarcely ever seen Catherine Hyde out of the church, or in the performance of some of her charitable avocations; and though he was fully aware of her

connection with the fashionable world, he had never fully realised it before. Absorbed in the contemplation of her spiritual life, he had almost forgotten there was another existence, from which Catherine could not divest herself, an existence composed of the worldly frivolities against which he preached so powerfully, and filled with handsome aristocratic men, whose powers of fascination were in every way likely to seduce the mind of a young and beautiful woman.

The heart of the young minister turned sick with sudden terror, as he remembered the terrible dangers to which his lovely neophyte—the one pet lamb of his flock—was so constantly exposed, while he, careless and unthinking shepherd, was absorbed in other duties. Great God ! whatever had he been about ? what was the use of his prayers and his preaching, when he left her in the midst of the temptation ? How could he alter it?—he could not remove her from the care of her beloved sister, when he knew that

sister was her only protection—their aunt, Miss Betty Hyde, having died suddenly about a year before. No, the only safety for Catherine was marriage—she must be married—married? the very thought of such a thing sent another pang right to the young priest's heart.

What man could be found worthy of her? What fit companion for his pure-souled child? Certainly none of the men he saw about her now, with the wickedness of Adam stamped on their high-bred faces. He shuddered, as he thought of the profanity of uniting his spotless lily to one of the reckless dare-devil spirits who, with passions it made him sick to think of flashing out of their bold bad eyes, lounged under Sir Reginald's trees. No, she must be saved from such a fate as that; she must be guarded and tended, and fed with spiritual admonitions, and then, if he failed to persuade her to join the Sisterhood of Mercy he was establishing in Rubestown, some true gentleman must be found, one of his

own choosing, to wed with the flower of his flock.

One of his own choosing! Ah! noble, high-souled Adrian, where wilt thou find the man that shall come up to thy standard of perfection?

Adrian never in the slightest degree suspected that it was anything except a deep interest in his beautiful parishioner's spiritual welfare that caused this commotion in his breast. Pure in thought as in deed, devoting himself solely to the service of his Creator,—the idea that a marriage with the lovely sister of Lady Slade would advance both his prospects and his happiness never for a moment crossed his mind. A celibate he was, and a celibate he determined to remain, God granting, to the end of his days.

No thought of woman, as woman, ever disturbed his pure meditations. He regarded the female creation simply as softer souls, who required, in most instances at least, a softer direction. Sometimes the

Rev. Adrian Hope had found the souls very hard indeed. How the hard ones ever resolve themselves into impalpable spirits, I cannot conceive. I should expect to find a fossil when the dust of the flesh was consumed.

The soul of Catherine Hyde, being composed of that happy medium which so nearly approaches perfection, received his instructions and advice, with the ductility of pure metal, which, directly it receives the impression, hardens into perfect form.

The church and the Rev. Adrian Hope were Catherine's sole idea ; all other duties, all other pleasures, were made subservient to the ruling passion of her life. Other people's feelings, or other people's wishes, were but secondary considerations with the beautiful devotee.

Such was the state of things at the present time. Catherine Hyde, strong in her own selfishness, "ruled the roast" at Chesham Court. Lady Slade, absorbed by her baby, left her sister to her own devices,

and Sir Reginald, too much engrossed with his own affairs, paid little attention to either. Proud and self-willed, the ministrations of the youthful Rector had, up to now, only resulted in making Catherine Hyde prouder and more self-willed. The axe had never been laid to the root. Humbled to the dust must that haughty spirit be before it could rise to what it so arrogantly fancied itself now—a veritable child of God.

Catherine Hyde had never heard of the virtue of humility, and without humility there is no real religion. It is true, that in her dealings with the poor, her manner in the church and schools, Catherine Hyde had become softened and subdued. She no longer swept to her seat with the haughty step that she did before she knew Adrian Hope; she no longer raised her trailing skirts with a curve of disdain on her sweet proud lips when she entered the homes of the poor, or pushed aside the dirty little brats who laid their sticky

fingers on her rich shimmering silks. She would sit patiently for hours, listening to the garrulous complaints of a rheumatic old woman, or nursing some ragged child whose mother was too poor to send him to school.

It was love, not religion, that had wrought this change. The Rev. Adrian Hope would, most likely, call at the rheumatic house, as he went his daily rounds. The Rev. Adrian Hope had taken an especial interest in the incorrigible young shaver whose normal condition was so picturesque.

They might call it what they liked ; they might hide it under the cloak of religion ; (and, by the way, what a spacious cloak she has, and what a capacity for concealment); they might call it charity, sympathy, spiritual fervour, or any other name they pleased ; but it was love,—love, pure, holy, and sincere, that brought these two souls together.

Blind they were, and blind they might remain ; but the seed was sown that had emanated from the Divinity of God, and could only find its perfect fruition in His bosom.

CHAPTER III.

DOWN BY THE RIVER-SIDE.

ROSAMOND ETHERIDGE was a very wicked young woman; it is no use the reader thinking she was not. I, the author, say she was; and as I have known her, girl and woman, for these twenty years past, I must be allowed to be the better judge.

What business had she, a properly-sprinkled young Christian, a member of "All Saints'", and other ghostly communities, a *protégé* also of the wealthy Lady Slade—to meet a man alone by the river-side on a memorable evening in August, and that man one of the gayest and wildest of London society.

What had been the use of the education she had received at the first-class seminary for young ladies—they had no such things as ladies' colleges then—where she was instructed in every principle of virtue and morality? What had been the use of her poor mother's admonitions and tears, and the sound religious teaching she had obtained from such pious females as Miss Sarah Archer and Co., if this was to be the end?—a clandestine meeting with a profligate young nobleman, one whose character was that of an established *roué*. What had been the use of the struggles and trials of poor Mrs. Etheridge, of the shifts and manœuvres to launch her daughter fairly into society—of the gentle advice of Lady Slade, and the opportunities she had of mixing with the higher world, if now she was going to set both society and the world at defiance, by descending to a level with the humblest of her sex?

For Martha Ann can but resort to such a mode of expressing her sentiments when

she lives at a place where no followers are allowed, and there is, very mercifully, a code of morality for the lower classes that is quite out of the reach of their loftier sisters.

No one in Martha Ann's walk of life could have seen the slightest harm in her taking a stroll with her young man on a lovely Summer's eve. If, as was occasionally the case, Martha Ann thought fit to record the remembrance of that pleasant walk by a subsequent visit to the workhouse, that was the depravity of human nature exemplified especially by Martha Ann. The customs of the world outside society had nothing whatever to do with the question.

In Rosamond's case it was very different. She was a young lady "in society," and young ladies in society never walk with gentlemen without the protection of responsible people; so, therefore, I say Rosamond Etheridge was a very wicked young woman, and the admonitions and advice she had received had all been thrown away,

for in this particular instance she acted just as poor ignorant Martha Ann would have done.

I am afraid to record all her depravity ; honour compels me to state the perfect truth, and the truth in this instance is rather shocking—for Rosamond Etheridge, with an utter disregard of either society or proper maidenly self-respect, not only met this bold bad man, but actually allowed him to kiss her, as though she were quite accustomed to this style of thing.

If society could but have seen her ! if society could but have turned its pharisaical eyes for one moment on the pair, good-bye for ever to Rosamond's hopes of future preferment. It would have cut her dead to a certainty the next time it met her, and gathered up its trailing garments for fear of the contamination of her touch. Luckily for Rosamond Etheridge, society was not there to see ; it was Sunday evening, and society had either gone to church, or shut itself up in its grand houses, with a Bible or

billiard table, as the taste of the occupiers might suggest.

Sunday seems to belong essentially to those who are "Out of Society;" it is really a day of rest to the hard-worked mechanic, the pale-faced milliner, the miserable city clerk, who never see the sweet green fields, or the bright blue sky, on any other day.

If future generous governments continue shutting up the poor man's amusements, stopping his recreations, and thrusting religion down his throat, (till it comes in the shape of a dose of physic, to be taken regularly twice a week,) in the way they have hitherto done; or if the aforesaid liberal governments deprive the poor man of his beer and his bowls, while they leave his rich brothers their clubs and their cards, it is easy to foresee what will be the end—an absence of belief in governments at all, both spiritual and temporal.

Perfect rest and perfect repose means the absence of work, both of body and brain. Shall we call that rest perfect, which

destroys rest's legitimate offspring—gratitude to God—goodwill to man?

Can the forced lip-service in a heated stuffy church be the praises and prayers a great God requires, who looks to the heart alone?

They were only the men and women "Out of Society" abroad on that summer's Sunday evening, when Rosamond Etheridge and her lover (for Lord Arthur Trelawney was her lover) walked through the golden corn-fields down by the river-side.

As I have mentioned before, the country round about Rubestown was both pretty and picturesque, and the sunlight lay in parting glory over the bright green meadows, the distant parks, and fields of waving corn; it kissed the bosom of the river as it swept lazily and languidly under the old stone arches of the bridge, and it fell on the quaint old houses that almost overhung the stream on each side of Rubestown. Seen from a distance, where a bend in the river

revealed the whole panorama to the view, Rubestown presented almost the aspect of a French city, standing in clear relief against the soft bright sky, with its many church spires pointing up to heaven ; its curious gabled gurgoyled houses, and the towers and turrets of its ancient walls, now fast falling into decay.

But the country ; that was superlatively English, no French town had such sweeping upland, such wealth of pasture, such fields of grain, with charming homesteads dotted through their midst, as had this little peaceful agricultural town that lay in the valley watered by its shining river, surrounded by the solemn hills.

It looked very pretty on this sweet summer eve, bathed in the departed glow of the setting sun, with the pale blue smoke curling languidly on the air, the lights and shadows playing on its quaint embattled walls.

The soft music of innumerable bells was wafted on the wind ; the faint buzzing o

insects, and the ripple of the river, alone disturbed the lovers' solitude.

They were far enough away from the town to be completely unobserved; a couple, similarly occupied as themselves, were strolling on the towing path, but were too much engrossed with their own affairs to notice our lovers; and Lord Arthur Trelawney had little difficulty in persuading Rosamond to sit down on a sloping bank at the side of a sheltering corn-field.

"Had you much difficulty in getting out, little one?" he asked, leaning back against a primitive stile, with the careless grace that was so inseparable from his movements, and taking his fill of looks at the soft shy face, that was turned away from his ardent gaze.

"Not much," replied Rosamond, with a slight nervous laugh. "Mamma had a headache, and preferred lying down to going to church; so she will never know of my absence."

"Are you not aware, you ungodly young

woman, that it is extremely wicked of you not to go to church?"

"It may be very wicked, but it is very nice," said Rosamond, hiding her crimson cheeks in both her hands, but smiling nevertheless.

"What would the congregation of 'All Saints' say, could they but see you now?" continued her tormentor, deliberately securing one little hand in his.

"They cannot see me, and I don't care if they could"—this with a quick defiant toss of the head.

"Oh, perversity of woman kind! have you never read, Rosamond, that 'Don't care' came to a bad end? Are you not shocked at the thought of the disedification you are giving to the pious souls at 'All Saints', who, at this very moment, will be missing you from your accustomed place? Think of the scandal, the disturbance to their meditations," went on Lord Arthur, in his mocking voice; but the grey eyes of the girl were turned upon

him, two large tears trembling in their midst.

"Oh, Arthur, pray don't teaze me so," she pleaded. "You know very well I do care. You know how much I hate all this deceit and sham. Why do you taunt me with its remembrance? Is there not pain enough to bear without your adding to the torture?"

Lord Arthur Trelawney bent over her, his arm clasping her slender waist.

"Rosamundi, Rose of the world," he cried, in his soft *trainante* voice. "I was only jesting. I would not pain you for kingdoms, my darling. Forgive my heedless manner, sweet Rose."

The smiles came rippling back to the girl's agitated face. She looked up shyly, tenderly. "Oh, Arthur," she murmured, "when will there be an end to it all? When shall I be able to hold up my head with the fearlessness I did before?"

Lord Arthur Trelawney was silent and thoughtful; his dark heavy brows con-

tracted, as if in pain. With the hand he had at liberty, he threw some pebbles into the river, watching the circles as they widened and disappeared.

"You must be more patient, Rosamond," he said, after a pause. "Rome was not built in a day; and there are so many difficulties in the way just now."

Rosamond sighed. The point was a sore one with her. Apart from the deception she was obliged to practise, and which was so contrary to her frank open nature, she would have been so proud to show her noble handsome lover to her mother and her friends.

Lord Arthur heard the sigh. "I explained all the circumstances to you before;" he said, half impatiently, "are you getting tired, or doubting me, Rosamond?"

"No, no, you know I'm not," she cried, eagerly, "but the life I lead is such a lie! Mamma, Lady Slade, all those who love me, think me so different to what I really am."

"All those that love you!—am I no one then, Rosamond?" he spoke reproachfully, tenderly, with the soft dulcet tones that had led many a less confiding woman on to her destruction.

"Beyond them all," cried Rosamond, passionately, "is it not for your sake that I do it? But it pains me so to see my mother's anxious face, and know I cannot tell her."

"Be patient, my Rose," said her lover, soothingly. "Cheer up, little woman; it is only a passing cloud."

"But you cannot think how I hate it all," persisted Rosamond, determined on having her pet grievance out, "how I detest myself, knowing what a sham I am before all those women."

"What women, dear?"

"Why, all I know; Miss Hyde, Mrs. Harrington, Maria. What would they think of me, if they saw me now?"

"Probably envy you, after the nature of women."

Rosamond laughed, though provoked.
“ Envy me, you great conceited thing !”

Lord Arthur smiled, with the conscious vanity of his sex. “ I think *one* would.”

“ Who is that ?” exclaimed Rosamond, turning quickly round, a jealous ring in the tones of her voice.

He looked smilingly down on the flushed eager face, the unconcealed evidence of the girl’s love was intensely grateful to his sense of possession.

“ That would be a breach of confidence, would it not ?”

Rosamond made a gesture of impatience.
“ Don’t teaze me. How can there be a breach of confidence between you and me ? How dare you have confidences with another, sir ?”

He took the crimson excited face between his strong white hands, letting his eyes devour it with their passionate hungry glances.

“ Little darling,” he said, after a moment of silence—ages to the tortured girl, “ do

you think any one has the power to take me away from your side?"

But Rosamond was not going to be put off so. "That is not an answer to my question—who is it, Arthur?"

"Well," he said, stroking his silky black beard, with a merry twinkle in his eyes. "I fancy Mrs. Harrington would not object."

Rosamond laughed scornfully—"Mrs. Harrington—a married woman?"

Lord Arthur grew suddenly grave. "You are right, Rosamond, I was only joking; but I had no business to joke on such a matter at all. Forgive me, dear; she is no subject of conversation for you, my pure little Rose."

Rosamond sat, her hands clasped round her knees, gazing thoughtfully over the river.

"I hate that woman," she said, after a pause.

"Strong expressions, Baby, you should hate no one."

"But I do, Arthur—I hate her."

"She more deserves your pity," replied Lord Arthur, with the faintest possible sneer on his curved upper lip. "Mrs. Harrington is—"

"What, Arthur?"

"Oh, never mind," said her lover, hastily, "don't let us talk about her, my pet."

"But I do mind," persisted Rosamond, determined as she always was on having her say out, "not that I mistrust you, Arthur; but I mistrust her, she is no friend to Lady Slade."

Lord Arthur looked up curiously, and gave vent to his sentiments in a prolonged whistle.

"So you have discovered that, have you? I did not give you credit for so much penetration."

"I have discovered she is a bad treacherous deceitful woman," exclaimed Rosamond, excitedly, "I found that out years ago. I am sure she is playing false with Lady Slade, but I cannot get hold of proofs."

“Why should you trouble yourself about it?” said Lord Arthur, coolly, admiring the toes of his patent boots, “I do not see what affair it is of yours, Rosamond; in fact, I hope you will not mix yourself up in any such matters—let them find their own level.”

Rosamond withdrew herself from his encircling arm. “What affair it is of mine!” she flashed out. “Arthur, how strangely you talk! Do you think I can see the loveliest sweetest woman in the world, deceived and betrayed, and yet look on, with calmness and indifference?”

Lord Arthur gazed with some surprise at her excitement. “I had no idea you felt this so deeply,” he said, in the grave earnest tone, that lay so often under his mocking cynical manner. “Do you really care so much for Lady Slade?”

“Care for her! Oh, Arthur, I love her almost as well as I do you, my darling—she has been friend, sister, everything to me; but for her I should never have been in

society ; but for her," she added blushing, " I should never have known you."

" That being a benefit is a problem which has to be solved. But seriously, Rosamond, I had no conception Lady Slade was such an object of interest to you. Women hang about each other in that enthusiastic sort of way, and it all means nothing ; probably they would like to cut each other's dear little throats at the same time, if they could."

" Arthur !"

" Oh, not you, Rosamond, of course not, my dear—you are above the ordinary weaknesses of your sex ; but I wish I had known—I might have prevented—not *that* you know—but some things."

" What things, Arthur ?"

" Oh never mind," he answered carelessly, " nothing that can be remedied now, I fancy," he added. " Lady Slade has not much to fear from that dark browed Cleopatra—Slade would never be such a fool, and he is too selfish to trouble

about any woman ; he has something more to think of than coveting his neighbour's wife ; he is going the pace a great deal too fast, and will find himself up a tree some day."

" Up a tree ?"

" Yes, my *ingénue*, which means in polite language, in the hands of those ancient and respectable people the Jews ; it has never been their custom to leave much on the field of battle. Let us talk of something else," he said, laughing at Rosamond's look of wonder and concern—" *à propos* of Lady Slade. How do you get on with her sister, Miss Hyde ?"

" As oil with water, as fire with ice," replied Rosamond, reassured by her lover's cheerful tones. " I believe she looks upon me as one of the reprobate, if I am not already classed amongst the lost ;" and the girl's merry laugh rippled over the river as she played with the flower in Lord Arthur's button-hole.

" I'm not sure Miss Hyde is not right.

I believe you *are* a bad one," remarked her lover, gazing down into the grey depths of her lustrous eyes.

"Birds of a feather flock together," answered Rosamond, saucily, but turning her hot flushed cheeks away. "If I had not been desperately wicked I should never have known you, Arthur."

"There is some truth in that," he said smiling, throwing himself back against the burnished corn, and watching her from under his long dark lashes. "I'm bad enough, God knows."

Rosamond veered round to the other side as quickly as a weather-cock.

"I don't believe you're bad at all," she cried; "I believe nothing of you but what is good."

Lord Arthur laughed a gay careless laugh.

"Complimentary, but untrue. Let me tell you, my Daphne, your lucid mind has never sounded the depths of iniquity to which I could descend—God forbid it ever should. Why," he added, "I fancy I never

believed in goodness at all till I met you, you little witch!"

"What nonsense you talk, Arthur," said the girl, blushing with pleasure. "Nevertheless, you must have met far nicer women than myself."

"Don't remember them if I did," said Lord Arthur, coolly, pulling a long ear of corn between his lips as he spoke. "I have always entertained the same opinions as La Rochfoucauld concerning women."

"Who was he?"

"A philosopher, sweet Rose; never mind about him. I recant—I will give the lie to Homer. I will fling my glove in Ovid's face. I beg pardon, my dear," catching sight of Rosamond's large grey eyes wide open with astonishment; "I'm talking Greek, I know, but long acquaintance with those ungodly old pagans makes a man degenerate in his speech. So you don't think I am quite as black as I am painted? There are those who would say, 'you were unwise in your faith, my child.'"

"I care not what they say," replied she, with passionate fervour. "I will not believe a word against you, my handsome noble Arthur; you are everything that is good and beautiful in the world to me. Ah, I know all they say," she added, with a little saucy smile, "they say you are a gambler, and a *roué*, and that no woman's character is safe within your reach, but I know better. I know how good and true you really are, my own dear love."

The man of the world gazed down on the little eager face, that was raised with such adoring worship up to his. Cynic and sceptic as he was, the simple faith of this country-bred girl touched him more than he supposed. He drew her gently and tenderly to his side, stroking the bright masses of her wavy hair.

They were standing now against the old wooden stile, as Rosamond's term of absence had nearly expired. The hours had flown so quickly in their fond delicious converse, it was growing dusk before they were aware.

“ They only say the truth, little woman,” said her lover, gravely ; “ I have been all and worse than they describe. I have never spared man in my anger, nor woman in my love, and now, by heaven ! I feel as if I were turning virtuous in my old age. I, Arthur Trelawney, setting up for a whited sepulchre,” and he laughed sarcastically, as if in derision. “ You had better take their advice,” he added suddenly ; “ you had better give me up at once and for ever ; I shall do you a mischief, child, if you don’t. I feel desperately wicked while you are near me, Rosamond ;” and he looked down at her such a look as Brian de Bois Gilbert might have given to the fair Jewess in the tower of Front-de-Bœuf.

She laughed a low quiet little laugh, nestling still closer to the strong firm arm that held her so tightly to his breast.

“ I am not the least afraid of you, you big audacious giant ; I don’t believe you are wicked at all.”

“ Infatuated young female ! what if I were

to eat you up now, like the ogre in the fairy tale ?”

She glanced up mischievously.

“ It would be very nice.”

“ Delicious little morsel, you almost take my breath away at the very thought. Why,” looking at her slender waist, her supple form, “ I think about three good mouthfuls would be sufficient. So you mean to trust me, Rosamond, in spite of all ?”

“ In spite of all.”

“ And to the end ?”

“ And to the end, Arthur.”

“ God grant you may never repent, my darling,” he said, increasing fondness in the tones of his voice.

“ I never shall,” replied Rosamond, resolutely. “ Come evil, come good, I shall never repent.”

Instead of kissing her, as another man would have done, Lord Arthur broke away from her clinging arms, and paced agitatedly up and down the towing-path by the side of the flowing river, leaving Rosamond won-

dering but not astonished at the freaks of her aristocratic lover.

The shadows were falling fast, but the moon, large and brilliant, rose out of a forest of chestnut trees, and flooded the river and the meadows with a stream of silvery light.

Lord Arthur came back to where Rosamond was standing, like another Ruth, amidst the corn.

“Do you know what I’ve a great mind to do?” he said, stooping down till his long silky beard caressed her fair white throat, “I’ve a great mind to run away with you to-night. You drive me mad with your beauty, Rosamond; and your sweet fond ways. Yes, you, you wild undisciplined thing. I have never had a moment’s peace or rest since I saw you years ago, an unfledged school-girl, in your little brown dress and the white rose in your hair. I determined then I would make you love me, if ever I got the chance, and I have succeeded, have I not, Rosimund, Rose of the world?”

"Yes, yes, Arthur!" cried the girl, a wild delirious joy taking possession of her heart, as she listened to her lover's passionate words.

Truly, Lady Moon, for all thy chaste appearance, a deal of very warm love-making takes place under thy very face.

The moon on this occasion was determined to be no party to any secret or clandestine vows, for she sailed in greater brilliancy than ever, majestically on the fleecy clouds, and did not even draw the faintest apology for a veil over her bold white face.

The lovers stood bathed in her silvery glory, and the light fell softly on Rosamond's hair and Rosamond's lustrous eyes.

Lord Arthur caught hold of her hands.

"Don't you know, you little witch, you are far more enchanting than all the women we have left up yonder, with their cold proud beauty, and their meretricious smiles. I don't know how I shall let you go; I wish I could keep you here for ever."

"I don't," cried Rosamond, suddenly gathering up her skirts, and jumping on to the bottom step of the stile.

"Rosamond, what do you mean?"

"*The frogs will be coming out soon,*" cried the girl, with a merry laugh at her lover's expression of dismay.

Lord Arthur frowned, and then laughed as heartily as she. "You wicked child," he said, as he helped her down, "you would spoil the prettiest speech a man ever made; no London young lady would have interrupted me like that."

"I'm not a London young lady, and I don't like frogs and toads," she replied, picking her way through the grass with a pretty semblance of mimic fright.

Lord Arthur had ample opportunities of admiring the small feet and well-shaped ankles as they twinkled over the dewy path.

They walked back towards the town, along the river side; Rosamond clinging confidently to the arm of her noble lover, talking such talk as only lovers care to

hear; speaking in half-whispers, though there was no one within a mile to listen to their conversation. So absorbed were they in each other, they were close upon the entrance to Chesham Woods, before they saw a man who, coming in the opposite direction, must necessarily pass them by. They were in the shade under the tall beeches that overhung that portion of the towing-path. He was in the full moon-light, but his head was turned towards the river, and he did not appear to observe either Rosamond or her companion. Rosamond, however, started and clung convulsively to Lord Arthur's arm.

"Who is that, Rosamond?" turning round jealously; could it be some unknown lover, at whose appearance she was so agitated?

"It is Mr. Burton, Sir Reginald's steward," she whispered, in a frightened tone. "Oh, Arthur, what shall I do if he has seen me?"

"What if he has? what need you care for a cad like that?"

"He isn't a cad, Arthur, he is a very nice man."

"I have no doubt he is a very estimable man," replied her lover with a sneer; "he would not dare to say anything about you, Rosamond; don't be so foolish, child."

"Oh, what shall I do if it gets to mamma's ears," repeated the girl with a sob in her voice.

"It will not get to her ears; trust me, darling, the fellow did not see you at all, he was looking the other way; if it does, write to me, and I'll thrash him within an inch of his life."

"Don't talk like that, Arthur," pleaded Rosamond, half-frightened at her lover's menacing tones; "it has all been my fault for coming. Mr. Burton is a very good man, and would not injure me willingly, I am sure, I have known him ever since I was a child."

"You seem to have a delightful set of acquaintances down here; we will try and alter all that one day, Rosamond."

Rosamond was piqued and puzzled by

the covert sneers in Lord Arthur's tones. "He is not exactly an acquaintance," she said, hesitatingly, "but he taught Jack and me to ride; and he has——nice strawberry gardens," she added, with a burst of her old merry laughter.

Lord Arthur Trelawney was satisfied. He had met the steward several times on visits to Chesham Court; he recollected something of Mr. Burton's grave manly bearing, his dark handsome face, and his jealous imagination had suggested that a marriage between the poor officer's daughter and the rising steward of Sir Reginald Slade might not be looked upon as such a very bad match; but Rosamond's undisguised merriment reassured him.

"You little gormandizer," he said, "I had no idea you were such an epicurean. Well, on the strength of the strawberries, perhaps your friend may think it advisable to hold his tongue. If he does not, make some excuse, say you met me accidentally, that I insisted on seeing you home. Con-

found it all, I wish I were not obliged to return to London to-morrow, but I shall come back soon, my darling, and then—”

He stooped down and whispered some words into Rosamond's ear, which had the effect of restoring the smiles to her lips, the colour to her cheeks, that the thought of his departure had scared away.

Over their parting we will draw a veil. The solemn hush of nature was around them, the night rose up and covered them with her dusky mantle, and the moon looked down calmly, serenely bright, as she has looked through all ages, on vows true and false, on hearts sincere and faithless, and will do till the end of time.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FUTURE MEMBER FOR RUBESTOWN.

PLANTAGENET JONES sat in his private room, at the Rubestown Bank, radiant and smiling.

That was Plantagenet Jones's normal condition, to be radiant and smiling ; whether he was eating his dinner, or taking his daily drive ; whether he was suffering from a repletion of business, or comfortably enjoying a friendly game at whist ; Plantagenet Jones was always the same—radiant and smiling.

Some people declared the banker never could be put out ; that such a thing as a frown had seldom or never been seen on

his jolly good humoured countenance. Many described it as giving them quite a pleasant kind of sensation, when he popped on them suddenly in an unexpected manner. He was like the sun, with this exception, the sun does not *always* shine, whereas Plantagenet always did ; he would beam as blandly on the poor wretch who came into the bank in the vain hope of getting his little bill renewed, as he would on the wealthy landowner, who kept a balance of some thousands there. His light, like the blessed luminary of the universe, shone equally upon the unjust as upon the just. Had it not been for the fussiness and *empresement* of his manner, he might have been taken for a benignant Sphinx, immovable amidst the ruin of ages. But no Sphinx, however benignant, would have been complete without its enigma ; and Plantagenet was as innocent of enigmas as the babe unborn. Everything with him was clear and above board. The way his business was managed, the way his books were kept,

and his balances struck, were all highly and intensely respectable ; in fact, to bank with Bullion and Co. (he kept to the old name you see) was as much a guarantee of respectability, as to be a member of the “ Rag ” is to the old military swells, who affect that particular club.

There was another bank in the town, where all the doubtful business was done—a bank that advanced money on risky securities, and dabbled in stocks and third rate insurance companies, whose principals were well known in London as public accountants and money-lenders ; but with this bank Plantagenet Jones had no connection whatever ; he ignored its existence ; all the influential Rubestownites ignored its existence ; there was but one bank *par excellence*, and “ Bullion ” was its name.

It was quite a “ picture,” (so the country people said), inside Bullion’s bank ; everything there shone with reflected light ; as the earth to the sun, so was the bank to the great Plantagenet—the clerks shone,

the counters shone, the scales shone ; from the large brass plates on the doors, down to the floor itself, all gleamed brightly with a golden hue. The place and the subordinates took their cue from their chief, and glittered in the halo of silver and gold. There was a perpetual shovelling of precious metal and sweet discordance of scales, broken at intervals by the peculiar rustle of crisp paper—a sound which, once heard, can never be forgotten ; but which of all delightful melodies is most charming to the ear.

A large oil painting of the deceased Bullion hung over the fireplace, and several valuable pictures relieved the walls from any danger of a cold appearance. The manager's room, where the distinguished Jones generally sat on his visits to the bank, was as cozy and comfortable an apartment as a manager could desire ; it was large and lofty enough to be cool and airy in summer, and sufficiently protected from draughts, to be the very quintessence of comfort in the

winter. The carpet was from the looms of Turkey; the chairs, though leather, soft and luxurious; and besides the necessary official desks, there was a handsome side-board, in whose capacious drawers were stored away some bottles of rare old Port, and unrivalled Sherry, with which Plantagenet used to regale himself and friends on special occasions. He had been indulging in a few glasses to-day, with a rich old squire, who lived some distance off in the middle of Moorshire, but who preferred to do business with Bullion and Co., having, (as he himself expressed it), much more faith in that firm than in the Bank of England.

The luscious wine had made Plantagenet feel particularly genial, and he was shining with greater radiance than usual, when his chief clerk entered and informed him that there was a person in the bank waiting to see him, who would neither give her business nor her name.

"What sort of a looking person is she, Pearson?" questioned Jones, smiling

blandly. It was one of Plantagenet's most amiable characteristics ; that he was always polite to the softer sex, whether they were rich or poor.

"A very shabby one, sir," replied the chief clerk, dubiously. "I endeavoured to impress upon her that your time was far too valuable to be taken up with questions our youngest clerk no doubt could answer ; but she persisted, and I had no other resource but to come to you."

"Show her in, Pearson," said the banker. "She is very likely some farmer's wife, anxious about her Hodge's deposits ; we must be civil to all, Pearson ; civil to all." And Plantagenet adjusted his necktie and diamond pin, in the large looking-glass over the fireplace, before preparing to make an impression on the lady, whoever she might be. He was in great good humour with himself and all mankind this morning, and did not feel the least put out or vexed by the circumstance of a woman of the lower orders daring to intrude on his privacy.

The thought of his forthcoming election was the one great idea that at present filled his aspiring little mind, and the consciousness of his own value in the eyes of his fellow-citizens enhanced his self-importance so much that his round jolly face fairly rippled over with smiles. At last he was appreciated; already he saw himself elected, and he determined to make such a sensation in the House when he took his seat, as would astonish the weak nerves of some members of the legislature, and completely snuff out his colleague Stanley Harrington. The speeches he would make to his constituents; the bills he would bring in for the good of his country and his adopted town; the denunciations he would pour on the heads of all the disaffected members of the House, passed through his acute little brain with the rapidity of lightning. He meant to be Somebody, and Somebody he would be; at all events it should not be for the want of trying. His power of language was remarkably great

—once give Jones a subject, and he would rattle on like a railway train. He found no difficulty in making a speech ; “ Why, bless my soul, sir, he would make a dozen while Stanley Harrington was thinking of one ; and they should be to the point, sir ; they should be to the point.” So Plantagenet Jones smiled to himself in the glass, as he studied the set of his irreproachable collar ; and it was a rubicund, jovial, not at all bad-looking image that smiled back again, as the door opened, and his expected visitor entered.

The woman, who seemed weak and ill, was attired in deep black ; a long veil hung over her face, which she raised with difficulty, as Plantagenet, never forgetful of his devotion to the sex, gallantly submerged the banker in the man, and handed her a chair.

“ Pray be seated, Madam,” he said, in his most urbane manner ; “ my manager tells me you wish to speak——Good heavens, ‘ Mary ! ’ whatever brought you here ? ”

The white face of the woman was scarcely whiter than Plantagenet Jones's, as he started back, gazing horror-stricken at his visitor.

"The want of money," she feebly returned with a weary shake of the head. "I don't think you need ask me such a question as that."

"Money!" he repeated, with white quivering lips, glancing nervously at the door, "you surely cannot want——"

"Not want," retorted the woman scornfully—"do you think less than absolute poverty would have brought me here?" and she looked round the room, with its luxurious belongings, with a contemptuous expression, that spoke louder than words.

Plantagenet, who by this time had somewhat recovered from his agitation, bolted the door between himself and the bank, and seated himself in a chair.

"Now you will please to tell me," he said angrily, "what you mean by this intrusion."

"I mean that my letters have remained for months and months unanswered ; that my applications for money have met with no reply ; that father and I do not believe your statements, and I have come to see for myself."

"Much good you will do by that," replied Plantagenet by a sneer ; "you will have to return the same way you came."

"That I shall not do, if I stop here for ever," retorted the woman doggedly. "Oh Planty," she continued, in an altered tone, clasping her hands, "have you *quite* forgotten us all? Does no thought of home and the poor old man ever cross your mind? I don't wish to worry you, Planty dear, but the winter has been so hard, and two of the cows have died."

"And that idle thriftless husband of yours is living upon you and my money, I suppose? I tell you, Mary, I will encourage idleness in no form whatever. I have had to work hard for what I have got, and I'm not going to have my money made

ducks and drakes of, by Reuben Watkins ;” and Plantagenet Jones paced up and down his room in virtuous indignation.

A faint blush stole into the pallid cheeks of his sister.

“ Reuben has not been idle,” she said, firmly, “ but a man cannot work when there is no work to do. The miners have all been on strike for the last six weeks, and then there was father’s long illness, and the children——”

“ Hang the children ! What have I to do with them ?” growled her irate brother. “ You ought not to have children, if you cannot support them. Why should I be bothered with other people’s brats ?”

“ It was my fault for mentioning them,” flashed out the woman. “ I thought, being a father yourself, you might have some feeling for others ; but I was a fool to think so—a bad son can have no sympathy with anyone but himself.”

“ What do you mean by a bad son ?” retorted Jones, the hot Welsh blood

flushing in his face, "have I not for years allowed you a hundred a-year, to take care of father? What more do you want, pray?"

"A hundred a-year!" repeated his sister, scornfully, "and how many thousands have you yourself? What is a hundred a-year amongst eight people?"

"It has no business to be divided amongst eight; the hundred a-year is allowed for my father's support. I washed my hands of you and your lazy husband years ago; I have nothing whatever to do with your affairs. If you cannot keep the old man out of what I give, I must find some one who will, that's all! I was an idiot for ever listening to your proposal to take charge of him."

The woman, who really looked very ill, pressed her hand painfully to her forehead, while the scalding tears ran down her wasted cheeks.

"It was kind of you then, Plantagenet," she said, between her sobs. "I am not ungrateful for the past, whatever you may

think, and perhaps I was wrong to speak so hastily, but it made me wild to see you surrounded with all this magnificence and luxury, and to know father and we were starving at home ; and then they said how rich you were, and how grand your fine house over the river was."

"*They* said—*who* said?" cried the banker, glancing nervously round the room, "Surely you have not been such a fool as to expose yourself and me."

"No, don't alarm yourself," replied his sister, checking her sobs, while her upper lip curled with scorn, "don't be afraid I let the townsfolk know I was the only sister of the great banker Jones, and had travelled up from Wales with scarcely a penny in my pocket, or a shoe to my feet, to beg a little help, in a time of sore distress—I had too much respect for *myself* to do that—I did not wish to be told I was a liar."

"I think you must be going mad, Mary," said the banker, wincing beneath her cutting sarcasms ; "why could you not have stayed

somewhere outside the town, and sent for me, instead of forcing your way in here? Only think if any gentleman was to come in now!"

"Well, I could go," retorted she, rising, "I do not think your gentleman acquaintance would discover any relationship between us, unless you informed him of the fact; there is certainly no likeness either in body or mind."

Plantagenet Jones paced up and down the room; this was a *contretemps* he had never anticipated. He had for years allowed his sister one hundred a-year for taking care of their invalid father, a sum which he considered fully acquitted him of all other filial obligations; and he restricted her to this amount, as he hoped by so doing to put it out of the power of any of the family making a raid upon him, or obtruding their obnoxious presence at any unforeseen time. The distance between Wales and Moorshire was so great, that he reasonably argued that by allowing his sister only sufficient to live on, and leaving no margin for extraneous

expenses, there was no danger of any of his relations taking a long railway journey with an uncertain result in the background. For letters he cared nothing—they were torn up and tossed into the waste-paper paper basket, without ever being read—he could not be got at personally, and that was all he minded. He had in this instance over-shot his mark, his sister was possessed of the same indomitable pluck and perseverance as that which had made Plantagenet's fortune—only, being a woman, she was the victim of circumstances, and obliged to succumb to misfortunes she was powerless to avert.

Much younger than her brother, Mary Jones had married, when quite a girl, the overseer of the Pendyllon mines, and for a while all was prosperous with them; then the mine, like a great many others, from some cause or other proved a failure; her husband was thrown out of employment, and poor Mary, with a young family on her hands, was obliged to apply to her only brother, who had left his native village years before,

and report said, was doing well as manager of the Rubestown Bank. To do Plantagenet justice, he answered her appeal, and sent them help ; and it was not until repeated demands on his purse roused his hot little blood to resistance, that he positively refused to give them any more.

Poor Mary toiled on, bringing up her children as best she could, her spirits alternately raised or depressed by her husband being in or out of work.

Reuben Watkins failed, owever, to get any permanent employment, and his health becoming impaired by constant disappointments, he fell into the low desponding way that Plantagenet Jones stigmatized by the term of idleness. But Watkins was not idle; if there was work to do, he was ready and willing to do it : he had the best of characters from his former masters, and no man worked harder when he had the chance.

It will all be known in God's good time; but there seems a sad fate hanging over some families ; try as best they may, no-

thing succeeds with them. The situation they might have had, has just been promised to some other man: the firm that once appeared so prosperous, is sure to fail if they enter the concern.

Mary Watkins worked as only a woman who loved her home and her husband can work; she had some little talent as a dressmaker, but even that was useless, when every year a fresh mouth came to be fed, and the cares of motherhood took up all the poor woman's time. It was at this juncture that her mother died, a small annuity dying with her; and the old father, a helpless cripple from paralysis and other causes, was taken to his daughter's house, to add to her other incumbrances. An appeal to the well-to-do son was not without its effect; the magnificent allowance of one hundred a-year, paid quarterly in advance, was granted at once, with a proviso, that no future increase was ever to be expected, and no demands by letter or otherwise made on the millionaire—in fact,

one hundred pounds a year represented the barrier between Plantagenet Jones and his family, as effectually as did the gates of hell between Dives and Lazarus.

For a time the Watkinses thought themselves in the seventh heaven of happiness—one hundred a-year in a small village in Wales, in the hands of a skilful manager like Mary Watkins, went as far as two would have done in a London suburb; but there was no margin for casualties. Old Jones fell ill, and even Welsh doctors require to be paid, and the hundred a-year soon dwindled down to fifty, in the ever-increasing wants of the paralytic old man. Still Mary did not complain; having been tolerably well educated herself in the days in which they were better off, she strove to give her boys the best education she could, in the vain delusion that some day they might be employed by their rich uncle in Moorshire.

There is no limit to a mother's fond imaginations! What other people put down as senseless and unattainable, her mother-

love thinks possible and practicable. She was doomed to receive a bitter disappointment. Her first proposal, that he should take her eldest son, a fine lad of fourteen, as junior clerk into his bank, met with a decided and peremptory refusal. She learned from that moment that her boys must seek elsewhere if they wished to obtain employment. Save for his generous allowance of one hundred a-year, their uncle was as much dead to them as if he had been lying by his mother's side in the church-yard on the slope of the old Welsh mountains.

It was only when debt and illness and absolute want drove the unhappy mother and daughter to the very verge of despair, that, after writing letter after letter to her cold-hearted brother, only to be met with contemptuous silence, Mary Watkins set out to undertake the long and wearisome journey from Wales to Moorshire, with scarcely sufficient money to reach her destination. She was determined to see for herself how her brother was really

situated, and, if report spoke truly, to shame him into doing something for his starving relations. She had overtaxed her strength; weary and footsore, her money gone, herself suffering from an internal fever, she arrived late at night at Rubestown, and at once made her way to the minister's house, feeling sure she would meet with kindness and relief. She was not mistaken—the first person she asked directed her to the Rev. Adrian Hope, as being the most charitable clergyman in the town: his reception of her, and his appeal on her behalf to Lady Slade, I have already described.

For two or three days she was too ill to move, but without revealing her name or her business, she gleaned from her charitable entertainers all and more than she wished to know, viz., that Plantagenet Jones, far from being simply the manager of the Rubestown Bank, was the sole proprietor, having married old Bullion's daughter, and was now a widower, living in great style outside the town. Mary Watkins

was told of his charities, his benefactions—the splendid establishment he kept up, and the magnificent entertainments he gave from time to time.

With her heart burning with just indignation, she made her way to the bank the first day she was able to walk, preferring to encounter her unnatural brother in his place of business, rather than run the risk of being refused admittance at his palatial home.

Mary Watkins's desires were few and simple ; accustomed all her life to be " Out of Society," she had neither taste nor inclination to enter it an uninvited guest. She had no wish to obtrude herself on her rich relations, or to pain the eyes of her brother's fashionable daughters by a sight of their low born aunt ; in her way she was as proud as themselves ; at all events she possessed most strongly the feeling of self-respect, and would have suffered far more deeply from an unwelcome reception than her purse-proud brother could ever have done at her unexpected appearance.

All she wanted was a little money to ease the pressing needs at home, a few pounds out of that superfluity which Plantagenet Jones spent with so reckless a hand. It was not much to give! and she his only sister—his own flesh and blood! and then the poor old father at home!

These thoughts passed through her mind as she watched her brother pacing up and down the room. Could they possibly have come of the same stock? she thought. Could the same mother have borne them both? Poor mother, it was well for her that she was lying calm and still, under the old willow tree in the Welsh church-yard.

“No, you need not be afraid,” she said, pursuing the tenor of the conversation. “I have no intention to disgrace you either by my presence or my remarks. I have heard of your wealth, your charity,”—this with a bitter sneer—“and the style in which you live. I leave it to your conscience, if you have one, how you should act, knowing this.”

Plantagenet glared at his sister for a moment, as if he would have annihilated her, and then threw himself back in his chair with a laugh.

“I see how it is,” he cried. “You have been listening to the mischievous twaddle of a parcel of idle ignorant fools, who, the moment a man is supposed to have scraped together a little money, exalt him into a millionaire. You have believed the groundless rumours of chattering boors, in preference to the statements of your own brother. You really do not deserve that I should do anything for you. You seem to utterly forget that my position as principal banker in this town entails upon me a certain amount of expenditure, which, though unavoidable, I am ill able to afford. I suppose, my good and clever sister, you have heard of such things, as the necessity of keeping up appearances?”

He spoke sharply and bitterly, and yet with such a ring of truth in his voice, that Mary Watkins felt bewildered—if after all

it was false, all she had heard ! She had not lived all her life in the Welsh mountains for nothing, and was perfectly aware of the existence of exaggeration. Her woman's heart, stung as it was by wounded love and pride, softened towards her brother. He saw his advantage, in the relaxed expression of her face.

"You may also have heard," he continued, "of such things as banks breaking ; of men, reputed rich as Cræsus, suddenly waking to find their shutters closed, and themselves ruined. Such a possibility might happen to me any day. How can *you*, who only judge from outside appearances, guess what anxious hours, what sleepless nights, *I* may not have ? How near beggary I may not be ?"

He did not look at all like bankruptcy in his fashionable clothes, with the diamonds sparkling on his breast and hands. He did not seem as if he spent many either anxious hours or sleepless nights, with his jolly round face, and comfortable propor-

tions ; and yet appearances are so deceitful, Mary could not but acknowledge there was a great deal of truth in all he stated. Such things had happened, she had both read and heard ; and she began to fancy, poor simple woman as she was, that she had judged her brother harshly, and that he might be compelled, as he stated, to live quite up to his large income, in order to hold his position in the eyes of the world. So she put out her hand with a feeble deprecating action, and touched him gently on the arm.

“Forgive me,” she said. Her voice, though she was turned forty, was still soft and low. “I dare say I spoke wrongly and hastily, Plantagenet ; but you do not know how bitterly I have suffered. You do not know what it is to see your children crying for food, and have none to give them. Father has taken nearly all the hundred the last two years, that I swear—give me a little just to help me home, and pay our most pressing debts, and I will go away,

and never trouble you more. The boys are growing up," she added, eagerly, with a faint flush on her pale face; "the two eldest are nearly out of their time; when their apprenticeship is over, they will be able to help their father and me. I only wish to make the last days of the poor old man as peaceful as I can." Mary Watkins clasped her hands, and turned her large hollow eyes full on her brother's face.

If anything could have moved that stony callous heart, it was the thought of his aged paralytic father; but the cold calculating meanness of the man never left him, even when his nature was most subdued.

"Come, come, Mary," he said; "you are talking more reasonably now. I am far from not wishing to assist you to the utmost of my power; but I assure you that hundred a year is all I can, in justice to my own children, afford to spare out of my real income—not the income my friends are kind enough to bestow on me," he added, with a forced laugh. "I tell you what I will do.

I will give you a cheque for fifty pounds, and you can write to me for the same amount at the end of the year. After that, you must manage to get on on your allowance; for I tell you candidly, I neither can nor will give more."

Mary Watkins burst into tears.

"It's no use crying," said her brother, harshly, mistaking the cause of her emotion. "I consider I am doing very handsomely by you, to spare another hundred out of my hard-earned income. But 'blood is thicker than water'—you are, as you say, my only sister, and God will no doubt make it up to me."

"God will," burst out poor Mary, struggling with her sobs. "God will ever bless and reward you for your kindness to us. Oh, Planty, don't think I am ungrateful. I will pray—the children shall pray."

"There, never mind your prayers," said the little banker, pompously. "I do what I do out of a conscientious feeling of what

is right and wrong. I am quite satisfied to leave the rest in the hands of the Almighty. You had better have a glass of wine and a biscuit," he added, touched at last by her white face and trembling form. "You really must forgive me for not thinking of it before. It is here," unlocking the sideboard, and producing some of his best pale sherry, and a box of biscuits. "A glass of wine will do you no harm, Mary. You certainly do look anything but well."

"I have been ill for some time," said his sister, smiling faintly, as the generous wine flew through her torpid veins. "I do not think my journey has improved me much, but I shall be all right when I get back—never fear."

"Of course you will," he replied, cheerily, his round face assuming its genial appearance at the prospect of his sister's departure. "And I tell you what I *will* do. I will send Mr. Simmonds, our youngest clerk, to take a place for you in this evening's

coach, so that you can get home by the night mail. I will pay your fare back—second, of course,—which will obviate the necessity of your changing your cheque till your return—it's no use losing time, when there is nothing more to do."

Mary Watkins, overpowered by her brother's generosity, thanked him repeatedly.

"You never said where you were staying, Mary," he said, struck by a sudden thought. "Perhaps you want a little ready money, to settle up there?"

Now that he was certain to get rid of her, a few pounds more or less would make no difference, and he might as well have the credit of doing the thing well. It would sound so much better when she got home.

"No, thank you!" she replied. "The Rev. Mr. Hope has done all that—a friend of his—a Lady Slade, I think he said—gave him some money for me."

"The Rev. Mr. Hope! Lady Slade!"

exclaimed the banker, aghast. "What—what do you know of them?"

"Oh, very little; nothing but what is good. Mr. Hope was like an angel to me when I first arrived; taking me in, and finding me a lodging with some kind parishioners of his. I am sure I should have died if it had not been for him."

Plantagenet mentally wished she had. What fresh trouble was she going to bring upon him now?

"Why do you ask?" said Mary, astonished at her brother's agitation. "Are they friends of yours?"

"I—I know them, of course," he faltered; "every one knows every one in this confounded place. Have you seen Lady Slade?"

"Oh no. She wanted me to go up to her house; but, of course, I did not."

"Certainly not!" replied her brother, feeling as though a load had been suddenly lifted off his breast. "I gave you credit for more wisdom than that. The less you

see and speak to people about here the better ; no harm has been done at present ; but remember, Mary, that if I hear you have betrayed your relationship to me, by word or sign, not one penny of that second fifty do you ever receive ; recollect I can keep my word !”

A painful flush rose to Mary’s pallid brow, but, with an effort, she stifled the reply that rose to her lips, and the brother and sister parted, as they had met, like strangers.

CHAPTER V.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE DEAD.

PLANTAGENET JONES, however, was fated to see his sister again, not in life, but in death ; not in anger, but in peace, the peacefulness of an eternal repose.

Two or three days after Mary Watkins' visit to the bank, the inhabitants of Rubestown were startled by the intelligence that a woman, answering the description of the Rectory stranger, was lying dead at Holmthorpe, the station nearest Rubestown.

There was nothing found on her to indicate her name or her destination ; no papers or letters of any kind, except that in a shabby little purse there was discovered a

cheque for fifty pounds on the Rubestown Bank, made payable to one Mary Watkins, and bearing the signature of the great banker himself. It was feared she had obtained possession of it in some dishonourable manner, her clothes were so shabby, her whole appearance so wretched and poverty-stricken. Besides, the doctor who was called in to see her, testified that she had died from the effects of starvation and over-fatigue, caused by taking some long journey in a totally unfit state of health. She did not seem to be at all a likely person to be in the lawful possession of fifty pound notes, and the authorities felt it their duty to communicate, not only with the police, but with Plantagenet Jones, as the signature on the cheque being his, they feared it was some member of the banker's family who had been robbed by the dead woman, who was now answering for her crime at a higher tribunal.

The station-master's account was, that the woman had arrived by the evening

coach from Rubestown, and stated her intention of going on by the night mail, but that shortly after arrival she had been seized with violent spasms, so great, in fact, that all idea of proceeding that night was at an end.

The station was fully a mile from the nearest farmhouse, and the kind-hearted station-master had no difficulty in persuading his sympathising wife to allow the sick stranger to pass the night under their hospitable roof.

The morning, however, brought her no relief, the woman grew worse instead of better, and when the doctor whom they sent for arrived, he gave it as his opinion that she could not last out another night.

In vain they questioned her as to her name or whereabouts. "She had no friends," she said ; "all she wanted was to get a little better and continue her journey, they should be rewarded for their kindness and trouble ; but she *must* not die, she *could* not die just then."

Tears filled the eyes of the kind Samaritans, as they listened to her importunate entreaties for relief, to her ceaseless asseverations that she must continue her journey. They could not find it in their hearts to let her go to the workhouse, as the doctor advised. A few hours must end it all. Time enough, they said, for the poor cold body to be taken there, when the feeble spirit that animated it had fled; "it might ha' happened to theirs, and they was sure they wouldn't ha' liked to be sent t'poor-hoose, for sake o' a bit o' trouble."

She died in the night, without revealing one clue by which she might be traced, and on examining her things, the purse containing the cheque was found hidden beneath her pillow.

In spite of their pity and compassion, the suspicion that the dead woman might in reality be a thief, forced itself on their conviction, and determined them to restore the note to the drawer, in order if possible that the mystery might be cleared up.

Plantagenet Jones was congratulating himself on the clever manner in which he had disposed of his troublesome relative, when the news of her death—for he felt sure it was she and none other—disturbed his restored serenity. This was of all things what he would have wished to have avoided.

God only knew what would be the end of it! public exposure, the revelation of his antecedents and his connection with the deceased woman seemed inevitable. On the other hand, if he denied any relationship with her the circumstance of her holding so large a cheque of his bore, to say the least of it, a questionable appearance; and his respectability in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen was very dear to the heart of Plantagenet Jones. The question of robbery he never for a moment entertained, that could be proved at once to be a falsehood; besides, his own clerks were witness to the woman's presence at the bank, and then there was that interfering parson,

Adrian Hope, who would be sure to have his say about the matter. Was there ever anything so provoking in the world before? What the devil did she mean by coming to Rubestown and disgracing him in that way? He could have cursed her as she lay there dead.

There was nothing for it now but to put a bold face on the affair, and avow the truth in so far as that she *was* a poor relation, how near he would never reveal.

What could people say then but pity him for having such nuisances to bother him! while the largeness of the cheque would blazen forth his munificence to the world. On the whole, Plantagenet Jones began to see that his sister's untimely death was not such a bad thing after all, in fact he could make capital out of it. She could never trouble him anymore, and he would take good care no other member of the family should make their appearance in Rubestown. It would cost him some money, but the lesson was worth paying for. Therefore it was,

when the police authorities waited on him at the bank, to ask what information he could give them, respecting the cheque found in the dead woman's possession, Plantagenet boldly averred that she was a relation of his, though a very distant one.

"It pains me extremely, gentlemen," he said, inviting them urbanely to be seated, "to be obliged to acknowledge my connection with that low disreputable person ; but such is the fact. She has been a millstone round my neck for years." [Not a very heavy one, judging from his outward appearance.] "The family have long ceased to recognise her ; in fact, I—in fact, gentlemen, had it not been for your humble servant, she would have gone to the dogs long ago. But, what could I do ? I could not see the poor creature starve"—gazing round on his admiring audience—"and I've given her just a trifle—just a trifle," slightly touching the cheque, "to enable her to keep body and soul together. I did hope," he added, with an expressive

gesture, "to have induced her to alter her ways, but all my efforts were in vain. She no sooner got my money than she spent it; and you see the result! Let me tell you, gentlemen, that woman could have done well—done well, gentlemen, if she had only been commonly careful; but she was a hopeless case."

When Plantagenet ceased, a murmur of commiseration and approbation rose from his sympathising listeners. Plantagenet saw his advantage, and followed it up.

"Mine is not the only case in point. You have all of you, no doubt, some poor relations—some black sheep—in your family?"

Suppressed murmurs that they had.

"Of course! Where is the family without them? It was not the money I cared for. If I could have done the poor thing any good, she might have had as much as she pleased; but, God bless my soul! it was like throwing it in the gutter. Why, I knew I might as well have put that very

cheque in the fire as have given it to her ; but ' blood is thicker than water,' gentlemen, and as long as P. J. has a pound in the bank, his friends shall share it with him !"

The little man emphasised this concluding remark with a forcible blow on the table, which had the effect of startling conviction on the minds of his hearers. They did not require to ask any more questions.

" I'm sorry to trouble you, sir," said the chief inspector, " but it will be necessary for you to identify the body before we can get an order for its removal."

" Must that be done ?" asked Plantagenet, blanching slightly.

" Unfortunately, yes, sir," replied the man, respectfully ; " though, perhaps, if you told us where you would wish It to be taken——"

" Oh ! I'll come with you, at once," cried the banker, recovering his self-possession. " I have no doubt in my own mind as to her identity ; but you have your duty

to perform, and I will not flinch from mine."

It was not a pleasant duty, however, standing face to face with the dead, the dead whom he had so falsely traduced, so bitterly reviled ; but Plantagenet Jones was not a man to hesitate at a trifle, and the pale cold lips could utter no word of reproach, no painful recriminations now ; good or evil report were alike to the white, still corpse that lay on the merciful station-master's bed.

Quickly as the banker went, there was one before him. Adrian Hope had flown directly he heard the news, to see what last offices he could render to the mortal remains of the woman who had so excited his friendly compassion, and for whom, had she let him, he would gladly have done more.

The tears rose to the young minister's eyes as he noted the thin attenuated form the sheet could scarcely conceal, the wasted hands, the hollow sunken cheeks.

"Why did you not send for me?" he asked of the station-master's wife.

"Please, sir, it was all so sudden like; the poor thing was here and gone in a day, and she never telled where she comed from, nor who she was; and we had no notion she belonged to Rubestown."

"Neither did she," replied Adrian, gravely; "but when a soul is in danger of death, we cannot stand considering to what parish it belongs. Had she no clergyman with her at all?"

"No, sir," returned the woman, ready to cry at his implied reproof; "but she prayed beautiful, she did, and the hymns she repeated was summat grand to listen to. But, oh dear! it would ha' melted a heart o' stone to hear her talk about her childer, and beg to be taken to 'em."

"Children!" cried Adrian, in surprise. "she was married then?"

"Did yer not know, sir? Oh, yes! all her thoughts ran on her bairns and her father; but she was so wild like and wan-

dering in her talk, we could not reckon all she said for truth."

"Poor thing!" sighed the young minister. "And she never mentioned any name?"

"None but childer's names—Johnnie, and Willie, and Gwendoline, and Planty."

"Planty!" echoed the clergyman; the name struck him as familiar. He had heard Miss Archer address the banker thus, when in a playful mood.

The entrance of Plantagenet Jones himself put an end to the discussion, and explained the mystery so far as the connection of the dead woman with the banker was concerned; but Adrian was doomed to be still more mystified and bewildered by Plantagenet's version of his kinswoman's conduct.

"I cannot understand it," he murmured, passing his hand across his brow. "She appeared such a very different person to me."

"My dear sir, she would have deceived the devil himself, if he would have let her,"

exclaimed the Banker. "Of course you cannot understand it. I should like to know who could. However, poor thing, she is dead and gone now, and we will let her faults rest, if you please ; it is a painful subject for me to discuss—very painful, and now she is dead, I have no wish to exalt myself at her expense."

The Banker spoke in proud humility ; the truth was, he had no desire to enter fully into the subject of his sister's shortcomings. With the clear earnest eyes of Adrian Hope fixed full on his face, he had the uncomfortable feeling that the young clergyman did not quite credit all his assertions as to poor Mary's bad conduct and thriftless ways. And there was a questioning severity in Adrian's manner that utterly prevented him being at his ease in his presence. But the identification had still to be gone through, and the boldness was all assumed with which Plantagenet followed the stationmaster's wife into the bedroom, and stood by the side of his much-

wronged sister. Yes, it was she sure enough. The banker half-started to see the ravages illness and want had made in her once buxom appearance: ravages the peaceful repose of death could not utterly conceal.

In spite of the unmistakable suffering she had gone through, the likeness to himself was so great that Plantagenet gazed nervously across at the stationmaster's wife, to see if she, too, recognized it, but the good soul's tears were falling so fast, as she gently arranged the pillows under the head of the dead woman, that her visual organs were blurred and dimmed.

Not so Adrian; calm and composed, he stood like an avenging angel at the feet of the corpse, his silence far more expressive than words.

Plantagenet felt that the clergyman suspected some nearer relationship, and was secretly condemning him for his cruelty. But he needed no such judgment; his own heart, his very blood, rose up in witness

against him. And he would have given no small sum to have had the dead woman restored to life.

He never intended it should have come to this.

Unscrupulous and ambitious, he had fancied, by keeping his family in ignorance of his real position, he would effectually prevent them interfering, either with his intentions or his pride. Up to this time he had succeeded, and with careless indifference had never even thought how Mary Watkins could keep a family on the same income that he gave his cook. "Out of sight, out of mind," is a vulgar, but true, proverb; and the banker thought little, and cared less, how the people in Wales managed to live. All he desired was, that they should not trouble him.

But now when he stood face to face with the dead, and the whole sad story of years of suffering and misery flashed like a revelation on him, a pang of agony shot through

his heart, as he thought how little out of his abundance would have sufficed to have prevented this terrible end ; how small a sum would have made the dead woman happy.

He groaned in anguish. Mentally, he resolved he would make amends. She was far beyond all care or sorrow now, but those whom she had left behind—her children, her father,—they should suffer no more ; they should reap the reward of her noble self-sacrifice.

His own position—the prospects of his girls—demanded that their real relationship should remain as it ever had been—hidden in obscurity. It was necessary for the living that the falsehoods he had told concerning the dead should be persisted in to the last ; and he salved his conscience by reflecting that no calumny could harm her now, and he would more than repay the injury he had done her by his kindness to her boys. Therefore it was, with a lighter heart he turned away from the poor still

corpse, whose death had been necessary to soften it at all.

"I do not know, Mr. Jones, what your arrangements are," said the Rev. Adrian Hope, when they stood together once more down stairs. "I came over intending to see that this poor creature was properly buried; but now, of course, I must defer to you."

"Certainly! certainly! Mr. Hope," cried the banker. "I shall, of course, have my unfortunate relation suitably interred. I must return home now, as it will be necessary for me to make arrangements regarding the removal of the body to Bingley Towers."

"To Bingley Towers?" echoed Adrian, in surprise.

"Yes, sir; to Bingley Towers," retorted the banker, pompously. "And why not, pray? badly as she behaved, I cannot forget she was my kinswoman; and as such is entitled to be buried from my house. It shall never be said," he added, drawing

himself up, "that Plantagenet Jones treated his dead with disrespect."

"It was the unexampled generosity on your part, Mr. Jones, that astonished me," returned Adrian, mildly. "A distant connection, and one whom you say deserved so little commiseration in life, could hardly be expected to be thus magnificently interred."

"It shall be as I say," returned Plantagenet, disliking the searching tones of the young minister's voice. "We must let bye-gones be bye-gones, Mr. Hope. Is it not your duty to teach us the blessedness of Christian forgiveness?"

Adrian bent his head, but wondered in his heart how long, had she lived, would that forgiveness have been withheld?

It created no small astonishment at the Towers, when the girls and their cousin Sarah heard that the poor woman, whose sad and untimely death was the talk of Rubes-town, was a connection of their own; and that

Plantagenet Jones himself had both seen, and given her the cheque for fifty pounds.

Their astonishment increased, however, when Plantagenet announced his intention of having her buried from Bingley Towers, with as handsome a funeral as if it had been one of themselves.

“But who was she, papa?” questioned Maria. “Where did she come from?”

“Never mind where she came from,” testily replied the banker. “She was a very distant relation, or you would have heard of her before.”

“Poor thing! she must have suffered greatly,” said the tender-hearted Jane.

“If she did, it was her own fault,” returned Plantagenet, sharply; he did not like this cross-questioning at all. “You may be certain, my dear, that her acquaintance was no credit to the family, or I should have introduced her; however, she’s dead and gone, poor thing, and we

will let her faults rest with her, if you please."

"I wish she had come up here, instead of going to the bank," murmured Maria; "we might have done something for her, and perhaps saved her life."

"She shewed her good sense by stopping away," cried Miss Archer tartly; "it's a wonder to me she never let anyone know who she was. I suppose, lost as she appeared, there was an innate feeling of what was due to your father's position, that induced her to hold her tongue."

"How glad I am Mr. Hope was so kind to her," remarked Jane; "I shall like him all the better now."

"Mr. Hope is kind to every one," said Miss Archer.

"Ah! yes, but you know what I mean; especially kind to yon poor thing. How dreadful it would have been, if she had died before papa gave her that money; it must have made her last moments happy, to feel how kind he was."

"The nuisance I feel is that we shall have to go into black for a person we never knew," cried Maria. "I hate black, especially in summer, it is so hot and dark."

"It will only be for a very short time," said Miss Archer. "It would be the height of ridiculousness to wear it longer than three weeks or a month; your black silks will do very well trimmed with a little crape."

"Oh! nonsense, Sarah, I shall have a new dress," cried Maria; "everyone would know if we wore our old dresses."

"Well, it won't be for long if we did," remarked Jane; "but, to tell the truth, I am not sorry for the excuse of getting a new black silk, it will do so nicely to wear in Lent."

"As if you would keep it till Lent, Jenny," retorted her sister laughing; "why you will want another by then."

"Very likely I shall," smilingly assented the younger girl.

"It would not be either of you, if you did not make even a death an excuse for your extravagance," snapped the amiable Sarah.

"Well, if we do, I daresay you will follow suit," carelessly retorted Maria. "I don't suppose you will make any objection to papa's presenting you with mourning for his relative."

To which speech Miss Archer only vouchsafed an indignant look, and quitted the apartment, followed by the suppressed laughter of her youthful cousins.

Meanwhile the object of their conversation lay in one of the unoccupied rooms, in the western wing of the Towers, in silent and solitary grandeur. She who, while living, would not have ventured to cross the threshold of that princely abode, dead, lay surrounded by wealth and magnificence, of which her poor heart had never even dreamed. What a mockery it all was! What a terrible sarcasm!

The gorgeous trappings of the room ; the massive furniture ; the priceless ornaments ; of what value were they to the cold pale woman, who had died from starvation almost at the very gates of her brother's palace ?

The very pictures in their heavy gilded frames seemed to look down in splendid mockery on the coffin that enshrined her : so out of place did it seem in the midst of all that splendour, and yet : it was she who was victorious, it was she who was triumphant ! Those gates that had been closed against her living had opened to receive her dead. Those rooms, into whose sacred precincts she had never been admitted, were now appropriated solely to her use, and she lay in the silent majesty of death, sole monarch of all around her.

Truly it was a terrible retribution ! And her empire did not end here. Dead, she exercised a power over the cold callous heart that lay nervous and regretful in

another part of the house, that living she could never have possessed.

All sorts of projects—of vain regrets—of determinations to repair the evil done—passed through that busy brain as he tossed conscience-stricken on his sleepless pillow.

And, strange to say, he kept his word.

The promise made beside her grave was fulfilled to the letter. Her boys were placed in good situations; her girls well educated. The poor old father was well provided for, and even her husband, that bone of contention between her brother and herself, was relieved from the necessity of having to work when ill or unfit.

It was a splendid funeral that wended its way under the lordly trees of Bingley Park. The horses with their nodding plumes waving in the sunshine; the hearse with its grand paraphernalia of sorrow, betokening that one of the great ones of the earth had passed away.

There were only two mourners—Plan-

tagenet Jones and the Rev. Adrian Hope—and yet I doubt if many a corpse has more sincere followers than that conscience-stricken brother, and that young devoted priest, who grieved, as only a holy heart can grieve, for the poor soul that was cut off by so untimely a death, without even a minister to breathe comfort and consolation in her ears.

They buried her in the stately mausoleum of the Joneses. The poor simple Welshwoman was laid to rest beside the defunct Mrs. Jones ; and a monument, stating that Mary Watkins had departed this life in peace, was erected to her memory in the church.

And Plantagenet had his reward !

Rubestown rang with his praises. The hidden generosity of Mr. Jones was in everybody's mouth, and in all the local papers, and it did him good service in his coming contest for the borough ; for people felt they could scarcely in conscience withhold their votes from a man who supplied

his indigent relations with fifty-pound cheques at a time, and when they died, even through their own imprudence, had them buried in funereal splendour from his own palace.

CHAPTER VI.

SAVED.

IT was glorious summer weather down there in the sweet Moorshire country—a little too hot and sultry, perhaps, for those who had not large houses and shady gardens to sit in, but intensely delightful to Lady Slade and her companions, who spent the greater part of the day out on the cool terraces, or under the trees in Chesham Park.

Born and bred in the country, Beatrice possessed a love of nature that was innate with her very existence, and which she could enjoy to the full in her beautiful rural residence.

She was never so happy as when bidding adieu to her artificial life in London, she could fly back to the green pastures and sunny slopes of her moorland home, to enjoy with her child and her friends the free unfettered life she loved so dearly.

Rosamond and she ransacked their imaginations to provide outdoor amusements for Lady Slade's guests, and out-rivalled the picturesque conceptions of Watteau in the arrangement of their various entertainments..

There was always some water-party or picnic on the *tapis*. Chesham Court was admirably situated for these *al fresco* gatherings. The park was full of sunny glades and shady copses, where miniature waterfalls, the exact representations of nature, invited one to rest beside their refreshing cascades : or cool grottos covered with moss, and overhung with wild, sweet-smelling flowers, suggested an abode of the Dryads.

Some ancient possessor of Chesham

Court had evidently been gifted with a very vivid mythological imagination, so much so, that he had adorned his park with numerous classic temples and heathen statues, and transformed every available nook into an abode for the Muses. To these romantic and retired spots Lady Slade, whose love of the beautiful was as keen as that of her husband's ancestor, delighted to lead the guests with whom Chesham Court was constantly filled, always providing some little surprise for their charmed and astonished view.

Sometimes the sweet strains of music would suddenly discourse from a ruined temple, that might have stood on the plains of Thebes, and an impromptu dance would be the result, in which her youthful guests took part, the velvet sward springing lightly beneath their bounding feet. Sometimes a repast worthy of the old epicureans would be discovered, hidden in some rustic bower, where the perfume of wild flowers filled the air with a delicious fragrance, and

the tinkle of sheep bells suggested the idea of a pastoral gathering.

It was a golden glorious summer, such as Bouchier or Toussaint loved to paint, and the fair Lady Beatrice, surrounded by her little court of elegant well-dressed women and handsome aristocratic men, might have justly formed the subject of one of those exquisite productions of the painter of "*Fêtes Galantes*."

Pleasure certainly reigned supreme at Chesham Court, whether the heart of its graceful mistress ached or not; nothing was left undone, either by Sir Reginald or Lady Slade, to make the days pass as pleasantly as possible to the guests they invited to their house.

The men generally went out to shoot or ride over the moors, or to fish in the river, which at the back of Chesham woods was well preserved; but on certain days would join the ladies in some of those rural excursions on which Beatrice expended the most of her time and thought. She had

organised on this especial afternoon a little picnic at the very outskirts of the woods, where the land sloped down on both sides of the river, and the great branches of the beech trees overhung the stream. It was a most charming and retired spot : on one side, the rich dark woods, their foliage just changing with the coming autumn, the deep green sward, mossy and soft as velvet, redolent with clover and wild thyme, and the scented convolvuli ; on the other, the sloping meadows where the cattle grazed, and fields of golden grain waved in glittering light.

Far up the distant landscape stretched the cultivated lands, hill and dale, sunshine and shade, lawn and water, ending at length in the far-off purple of mountains. The flower flush of the heather mingled with the grey of the moors. Between both lay the river, strong, swift, silent, so shallow near the banks as to show the pebbles through the crystal water, so deep and still in the midst of the stream as to completely

deceive an inexperienced oarsman as to the dangerous currents that swept beneath the smooth and smiling surface. Water-lilies clustered in dreamy beauty here and there; tall reeds and sedges fringed its undulating banks, forming a nest for the water-fowl that infested the low marsh lands, and the shade of the graceful trees presented a cool and pleasant retreat to the angler and the student, who found here a spot in which to pursue their favourite avocations to their hearts' content.

To-day the usually silent woods re-echoed with the sounds of merry laughter and the happy murmur of voices, mingled with the rippling of the river. Luncheon was over, and the gay *coterie*, who had partaken of their fair hostess's hospitality, had all dispersed to wander at their own sweet wills whithersoever they chose; those who were lovers sought the shadiest nooks, the most retired glades, in which to interchange the vows and promises after years would probably see them break.

Some of the men went off to fish a little lower down the stream, others rowed their lady-loves far away up the river, to where the finest view of the surrounding landscape could be obtained. The young people amused themselves in gathering wild flowers or searching for nuts, though still unripe. The matrons clustered in little knots, discussing their husbands and children, and pulling the characters of their female acquaintances to pieces, as matrons will.

Lady Slade, who was rather fatigued with the heat of the day and her hospitable exertions, elected to remain in the place where they had taken lunch, in which resolve she was seconded by Rosamond Etheridge and the Harringtons: Mrs. Harrington being tired of flirting, and Stanley secretly intending to have a stolen nap beneath an accommodating willow. Rosamond, full of life and high animal spirits, was having a game of romps with the child Francis, whose golden head she

had crowned with a wreath of scarlet poppies. He toddled after her as fast as his fat little legs would let him, shrieking with baby laughter when she pretended to be caught, or hid behind a tree, for his infant majesty to find. Rosamond was very happy. Beloved by the man of her choice, the deceitful part she was forced to play in regard to her mother and her friends weighed, after all, but lightly on her breast. It only attacked her by fits and starts, and even then, the compunction she felt at the concealment of her attachment to Lord Arthur Trevelaney was greatly mitigated by the knowledge that it was both compulsory and temporary, and she hoped that the time would soon arrive when he would claim her for his bride before the eyes of all the world.

She was a true picture of happy girlhood ; with the careless joyous spirit, that all her London education could never keep in bounds, dancing in her eyes, and on her sweet red lips, the consciousness of reciprocated love filling her face with tender

beauty ; her step was as light and elastic as though she trod on flowers ; her merry laugh trilled out on the air as musical as the song of the thrush.

I can see her now, as she stood on that afternoon in a little boat that was moored to a stump by the river-side : one fair hand, raised above her head, grasping a branch of a silver ash, the other holding an oar. The sun crept through the soft green leaves and kissed her sweet soft cheeks, now tanned and browned, in spite of the large straw hat her mother insisted on her wearing, leaving some of its golden radiance in the bright beautiful eyes, and on the masses of her chestnut hair. Truly Rosamond Etheridge was a young and lovely woman, in spite of all her enemies might say to the contrary : her form, light as that of a sylph, was rounded and graceful, and the little perfect foot cased in its exquisite *bottine*, that was poised on the edge of the boat, might have reasonably excited the envy of Mrs. Stanley Harrington herself.

"Who is for a row?" cried the merry girl, dancing up and down with the motion of the boat. "Come, good people, wake up, don't go to sleep this beautiful afternoon. Lady Slade! Mrs. Harrington! let me take you for a row."

Beatrice shook her head. "I do not care for the water, madcap," she said; "I prefer staying where I am, go by yourself if you are so anxious to exhibit that portion of your accomplishments."

"Indeed I will not," laughed Rosamond; "I have no ambition to figure forth as a 'Lady of the Lake' without a 'James.' Mr. Harrington! come and be my James, won't you? Don't be so lazy, sir; I am watching you, sneaking off like a recreant knight to yonder copse. You shall not go to sleep; I'll cover you with grasshoppers and earwigs if you do, and your wife shall tickle your nose with the prickly grass. Lady Slade! make him come."

"I'll come without making, lovely Undine," cried the good-tempered Stanley,

rising and shaking himself, like a great Newfoundland dog. "I imagine I shall be quite as comfortable steering, as taking a nap under the pleasant contingencies you propose. There, allow me, what is it the poet says? 'Youth at the helm, pleasure at the prow' off we go, Miss Watersprite. Isabel, my dear, reach me some of those water-lilies, you will probably see me floating past by-and-by, like the picture of the Christian martyr."

The ladies all laughed, and Mrs. Harrington remarked with a shrug of her pretty shoulders, that there was no danger of nought ever coming to harm, when the baby Francis, who had been standing close by his mother's side, watching the proceedings with wide open eyes of innocent wonder, suddenly burst into a cry: "Osie, Osie, me go in de boat wid Osie. Osie take Baby, too."

Lady Slade caught him up in her arms. "Oh, no, my precious," she cried, "Francis must stay with mamma and god-mamma. Rosie will soon be back."

But the youthful heir kicked and struggled until he slid down again to the ground.

"Osie, take Baby," he cried, his blue eyes filled with tears ; " Baby be so dood."

" There is no room for you, my darling," explained his mother, kneeling down and wiping his tears away, while Rosamond, hesitating on hearing the cries of her little favourite, still kept the boat near the bank.

" I will go with them, Beatrice, and take Francis in my lap," suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Harrington ; " the boat is quite large enough for more, and with Stanley to steer, there is not the slightest danger."

" Oh, Isabel, are you sure ?" cried the anxious mother, clasping her treasure to her breast.

" Perfectly sure. Do you think I would risk my precious life if I were not ? I have too much regard for my friends," said the little lady with her mocking laugh. " Don't be so silly, Beatrice, you'll bring that child up like a girl, if you do not accustom him to what might appear

dangerous. Rosamond and Stanley are both good oars, and the river is just like a lake about here."

The child, who had been listening attentively to the conversation, here broke in : "'Es, me go wid dodma ; twite safe," he cried, kissing his mother's cheek.

"Ah ! my darling," cried Lady Slade, still unwilling to let him go, "don't go in the nasty boat, stay with mamma."

For an instant he hesitated, touched by his mother's pleading voice, and then, seeing Mrs. Harrington already seated in the boat and holding out her arms, his anxiety to go overcame his love for his mother ; "Not nasty boat, pretty boat," he said ; "Baby go with Osie and dodma, Baby tum back soon."

"Do be careful, Rosamond," cried Beatrice, as she gave the child into Mrs. Harrington's arms ; "I shall be in a fever until you return."

"There is no danger, dear Lady Slade," replied Rosamond ; "we will only row gently up and down, and not go far into the stream.

Surely you can trust me," with a reproachful glance.

But Beatrice could trust no one with her treasure but herself, it was only her foolish mother-fondness that induced her to yield to the wish of her darling boy, when her reason, though not her heart, was convinced of its security.

"And surely you will trust me, Lady Slade," cried Stanley Harrington, mimicking Rosamond's tone. "I know every inch of these happy fishing grounds."

So abjured, the still doubting mother watched the little bark move off, and heard the delighted crow of baby laughter as, propelled by Rosamond's firm clear strokes and Stanley's careful steering, the boat glided gracefully down the stream.

Indolent and lazy as Stanley Harrington was, rowing was one of his favourite amusements. He knew, as he said, every inch of the river in these parts; all the dangerous silent pools, all the strong swift currents. No boat could ever run amuck under

Stanley's cautious guidance: he knew his way when almost half-asleep as well as he did when awake to danger. Rosamond Etheridge, also, was a skilful oarswoman: many a match she had rowed with the Joneses on the Mere in their father's park, and the river both below and above bridge was as familiar to them as their swimming-bath at home.

Lady Slade was aware of all this, and gradually grew more contented as she went back to her seat under the old oak trees, and let her soft mother-eyes watch the little bark as it floated over the rippling waves. She could see her child held in the arms of his godmother, clapping his tiny hands in childish delight; she could hear his peals of merry laughter borne to her on the warm still air, as the feathery oars gleamed in and out the water, causing a shower of glittering spray to sparkle like diamonds in the sunlight. Her loving heart throbbed fast, and she murmured a prayer to God for the safety of her darling boy.

Merrily the little party passed up and down the river, Rosamond and Stanley pursuing the strain of amicable banter with which they had commenced their journey. Much as Rosamond disliked Mrs. Harrington, she admired her husband ; his careless *debonair* manner, his amusing laziness, his perfect gentlemanlike behaviour, (even under the ridiculous assumption of boredom), made him quite at home with the frank fearless maiden, who always spoke her mind when she had the opportunity, and saw nothing to admire in the covert sneers of his wife.

Mrs. Harrington sat, the infant heir in her lap, midway between the combatants, hitting first one then the other with her quiet sarcasms, or terse remarks ; but her attention was soon directed into a different channel, for Master Francis with the usual energy of his sex, was developing the organ of acquisitiveness to such an extent, that the small hands of the brunette could hardly hold him in. First he strove in

baby fashion to clutch at Rosamond's oars and try his hand at rowing himself ; then he insisted on leaning over the edge of the boat and paddling his fat little fingers in the limpid water.

In vain Mrs. Harrington scolded, and Rosamond threatened to take him back to his mother. The young gentleman having got his way by getting into the boat, seemed determined to pursue his advantage by keeping all the party in commotion.

"Rosie will take Francis back, baby isn't good."

"Baby is dood," immediately replied the young rascal, sitting demurely on Mrs. Harrington's lap.

A moment afterwards, and a large water-lily, or a brilliant river-fly, attracted his attention, and pounce he went to that side of the boat, in spite of his godmother's angry remonstrances.

"I think we had better return, Stanley," she said, uneasily, clutching tightly to the child's white frock ; "the Lord be praised

we have no children : heaven preserve me from a young monster like this !”

“ Nonsense ! hold him tight, Isabel ; it’s perfectly delightful out here. Hark you, you incorrigible young ruffian, sit still, or I’ll put you overboard.”

“ In de water ?” questioned the youthful heir, fixing his large blue eyes on his god-father’s face.

“ Yes, in de water, where de fishes will eat you up,” laughed Stanley; at which terrific threat, Master Baby sat quite still again, gazing solemnly at Mr. Harrington, to see if he really meant what he said.

They rowed up and down very pleasantly for a while, the sunlight glittering on the grey hills, the waving corn-fields, the rippling sparkling river. It was a scene of perfect peace, of absolute repose : on one side rose the Chesham Woods ; beautiful, majestic, dark ; on the other lay bright green meadows, studded with a thousand flowers, where the dark-eyed

oxen gazed in meditative silence on the merry rowers.

For a while—and then; a heap of tangled weeds came drifting by, borne by the current, close to the little boat—there was a child's sweet laugh; a sudden lurching of the boat, a flash as of white angel garments passing quickly before the eyes, and the infant heir of Sir Reginald Slade was struggling wildly with the dark cruel waters.

One moment, Rosamond saw the child's blue eyes, fixed with sudden terror on her face, the golden hair, the chubby baby fingers, and then a shriek broke from her lips, to be echoed by one on shore, so wild, so terrible, so heart-rending, that none who heard it ever forgot it to their dying day. Quick as lightning, Stanley Harrington sprang from his seat, tearing off his coat in frantic haste. True-born gentleman as he was, at the first call of danger he was to the fore; the same brave blood flowed in his languid aristocratic

veins, as that which caused the flower of England's nobility to lay down their fresh young lives on the heights of Balaclava.—*Noblesse oblige.* It suited him to lay and lounge about in his dreamy indolent way, like one of those brilliant painted moths whose lives are but a summer's day ; but in the cause of the defenceless or the oppressed, Stanley Harrington's nervous grip had made many a scoundrel tremble ; the small white hand of the aristocrat had proved more than a match for the burly fist of his ruffianly opponent.

In an instant he would have been in the water after the drowning child ; but his wife was clinging convulsively round his knees, holding him fast in the boat.

"Stanley, Stanley, are you mad?" she cried ; "you cannot save him ; see how fast the tide is running—Stanley ! for God's sake, stay where you are—you will drown yourself—you will!"

He struggled with her, as, white with something that had all the appearance of

terror, she twined her arms around his legs, swaying to and fro at the bottom of the boat.

“Let me go, Isabel!” he cried hoarsely; “how dare you stop me, when the child is sinking?—Rosamond, hold her; a moment longer, and it may be too late. Good heavens! she will have us all in the river: keep the boat steady, Rosamond, for God’s sake.”

Rosamond, paralyzed with fear, gazed wildly from one to the other.

“Stanley, you shall not go!” exclaimed his wife, desperate with her efforts—her dark eyes flashing with excitement.

“By heaven, I will!” he shouted, as with a violence he, usually so gentle to women, did not believe himself capable of, he tore her hands from their detaining clasp, and jumped into the river—another instant, and he was swimming with all his strength, to where he had seen the child rise for a moment to the surface.

But to his amazement he was forestalled

—a man, whose presence he had never noticed, and who seemed to have dropped from the clouds, was there before him, and was holding the apparently lifeless child high above his head, as with strong swift strokes he made for the shore.

Rosamond, who, petrified with terror, and struck to the heart by the piercing shrieks that rang from the agonized mother's lips, had taken no notice of the sobbing writhing woman in the boat, now rowed as quickly as she could till she reached Mr. Harrington who soon regained his seat.

"He is safe—he lives!" he cried, in answer to her imploring glance.

"Thank God!" burst from her heart; but her tongue gave forth no sound—her white trembling lips refused to speak.

"The man who has saved him called out to me as much," said Stanley, putting on his coat, with the utmost *sang froid*, and raising up his weeping wife. "Get up, Isabel, how could you be so foolish? see, darling, I am as right as possible; I thought you

knew I was a first-rate swimmer : row quickly back, Rosamond, the little shaver has given us all a terrible fright. I hope Lady Slade will not be ill."

Mrs. Harrington laid her head against her husband's shoulder, her face from white changed to burning crimson. "What would have been her loss to mine?" she cried bitterly. "She might have another child. Where could I find another husband?"

"Plenty, better than I," laughed Stanley, caressingly passing his arm round her waist—the big fellow was quite struck by this unexpected exhibition of devotion on the part of his spouse. "Cheer up, Isabel, we are both safe and well; Master Francis has taken no more harm than a jolly good ducking."

Mrs. Harrington sat arranging her drooping and disordered plumage. "I am afraid," she murmured, fretfully, "Beatrice will think it is my fault; but you are a witness, Rosamond, that I did my best to

hold the child in—you will tell her so, Rosamond, won't you?"

"I should scarcely accuse you, Mrs. Harrington, of wishing him drowned," replied Rosamond coldly; "it is my fault, I ought not to have seconded the child's wish to come."

"And there is no occasion, Rosamond," continued Mrs. Harrington, flushing deeply under her swarthy skin, and gazing uneasily at the girl, "to mention how I tried to prevent Stanley from risking his own precious life, I was quite mad at the time—I did not know what I was doing or saying. When you are married, my dear, you will then understand the dread of losing your husband," she added, with a forced laugh, and an upturned glance of affection at the delighted Stanley.

Rosamond made no reply. She did not like Mrs. Harrington's manner at all. She could not believe in that sudden desire to prevent her husband risking his life—a man whom she publicly called a fool and

an idiot, and laughed at twenty times a day behind his back ; besides, in those few moments when she was rowing to where the child sank, Mrs. Harrington had raised herself on her knees, and glared over the side of the boat with such a look of dire malignity and hate, mingled with anxiety, that Rosamond's heart turned sick with terror. She tried to fancy now—it was all imagination—no, those fierce burning gipsy eyes had scorched her very soul.

Stanley answered for Rosamond, stroking his wife's hair with his disengaged hand.

“ Of course not, you poor little woman. It was only natural after all ; though perhaps Lady Slade might not quite understand it—danger makes cowards of us all ; but my honour was at stake, my dear. Had the risk been twice as great I must have tried to save the child. Rosamond will say nothing that is likely to agitate Lady Slade, I am sure.”

Rosamond scarcely heeded his words ; almost before the boat touched the bank,

she sprang out, and was fleeing fast as a fawn up the glade, down which she had seen Lady Slade disappear with the stranger and the child.

Beatrice had seen the accident from the river-side, and the sudden rescue of her boy by some unknown man, who, at her first wild shriek, sprang suddenly from some covert near, and pulling off his coat, plunged headlong into the river. She was too intent watching his efforts to notice the commotion in the boat. She only saw the golden head and dripping white garments of her baby, raised high above his rescuer's head, and heard a voice shouting "He is safe." Then all became like a misty dream, till she found herself kneeling on the bank, clasping her recovered treasure to her breast, her tears raining fast on the senseless form of her child.

She was conscious of a manly form bending over her; of deep sonorous tones, uttering words of respectful consolation,

and kind, strong hands, rubbing and chafing the little sufferer's limbs.

"Oh! he is dead—he is dead," she cried, with wild despair.

"No, he is not dead, Lady Slade," replied the voice of his preserver. "He is only stupefied by the immersion—see," as a shiver passed through the little prostrate form, and the child's waxen lids quivered, and then opened with a look of bewilderment and terror.

"Oh! my darling. Oh! my darling," sobbed his mother, covering his face with kisses.

She struggled to her feet, still holding her baby in her arms.

"I must go home," she cried, wildly. "He is so wet, so cold. Oh, where are they all gone?"

"Allow me, Lady Slade, to carry the child for you," said the stranger. "See, here is my coat. I will wrap him up in it, and he will take no harm. Do not be afraid; he is only wet and frightened."

Suiting the action to the word, Mr. Burton (for it was he) covered the young experimenter in impromptu swimming with his large dry coat, and took him from his mother's arms. Beatrice, re-assured by his words, assented mechanically.

"Let us make haste," he said, in the tones of one used to authority. "The sooner he is put to bed the better. I hope I am not walking too fast for your ladyship?"

No. Beatrice would have flown, if needed, so anxious was she to be at home. She hurried along by the steward's side; and then, suddenly recollecting she had never thanked her boy's unknown preserver, she raised her pale and agitated face.

"Oh, sir, whoever you are, God will bless you for this act of mercy. Believe me, I am deeply—deeply grateful. Sir Reginald will be, I am sure. Mr. Burton, is it you? Forgive me; I did not recognise you in my agitation."

"Not in this plight, my lady," cried the

steward, whose dark face wore a flush of crimson. "It is so seldom that I have the honour of speaking to your ladyship, I could scarcely expect to be recognized, when I must look more like a drowned rat than anything human," he added, with a smile.

Beatrice noticed for the first time that he was dripping with water—her fears for her boy had made her selfish. She saw nothing in the world but her rescued child.

"You are wet—you are shivering,—and you have given my child your coat. Mr. Burton, you are a noble man."

The steward coloured yet more deeply at her praises.

"I have simply done an act of humanity, my lady. It was only my duty to try and save my little master ; as for the coat, I do not need it at all."

"God must have sent you to me," said Lady Slade, "at such a moment."

"I was fishing near where you were," he said, hesitatingly—"not aware that your

ladyship had a party in the woods ; and I was looking at the boat, when I saw the child spring suddenly into the water. It was but the work of a moment for me to reach him ; for although the undercurrents are very strong, the tide was in my favour."

He did not think it necessary to inform her, that, unobserved behind some friendly willows, he had overheard the whole of the conversation previous to the little party setting out ; that he had marked her look of deep anxiety, as she watched the boat in its course up and down the stream ; and, fearing lest any unforeseen accident might occur, had lingered near the spot in order to render any assistance in his power. He did not tell her that, if asked beforehand what service he would prefer above all to render his lovely mistress, he would have answered,—“to save her child.” What right had he, a steward, a servant, to think such things at all ? What fellowship could there possibly be between the plebeian

steward, and the fair patrician wife of Sir Reginald Slade ?

In the few moments in the water, when Beatrice's agonized screams pierced to his heart, some wild reckless resolve, that he would either rescue the child or die, had crossed his maddened brain. He felt he could never meet her gaze, if he had to lay the little corpse at her feet ; but, at least, her terrible grief would be mingled with pity for the man who had lost his life in trying to save her child. And again, one look of pity from those sweet brown eyes, would, (thought this madman), be something worth dying for twenty times over.

But to save him, to hear her soft voice invoking blessings on his head, to see that face, so like his dead Lucy's, looking at him with all a mother's gratitude on the pure pale features, was a reward so great that, at the very idea, the blood surged in wild tumultuous joy from the strong man's heart into his dark earnest face.

"God must have sent you to me," repeated Beatrice, softly and thankfully.

At that instant Rosamond, flushed and agitated with running, overtook them.

"Lady Slade—Beatrice—he is safe! he is well! Oh, forgive me! forgive me!" she cried.

Beatrice turned and clasped her in her arms.

"He is alive, and safe! Thank God!" she said, mingling her tears with her friend's. "There is nothing to forgive, Rosamond darling; it was quite an accident, I am sure. It was my fault, not yours; I ought not to have let him go."

"Oh, I feared—I feared you would never forgive me," sobbed the excited girl.

"My lady, we had better be moving on," said the steward gravely.

"Yes, yes!" replied Beatrice. "Oh, Rosamond, you must help me to thank Mr. Burton; but for him——"

"Mr. Harrington would have deprived me of the honour," he said, anxious to

relieve his mistress from any suspicion that the child might have drowned ; though he knew quite well that Mr. Harrington could not have reached him in time. " Mr. Harrington was close to me when I caught hold of the child's clothes. We should have had a struggle for him, if I had not been very sharp."

At this moment they emerged from the glade into the open, and were surrounded by many of their party, including Sir Reginald Slade, Miss Hyde, and the Joneses, who, on hearing the screams, had rushed in all directions towards the place from whence they proceeded.

Beatrice and Rosamond were besieged by a perfect Babel of voices, all desirous to know how the accident had happened ; while Sir Reginald, after satisfying himself that his heir was quite safe, proceeded to bully his mother.

" It serves you right, Beatrice," he said, angrily ; " you ought to have known better than to have let the child go on the water

in a cockle-shell like that ; I beg you will never do so again. Send for Dr. Wilson ; let Dr. Wilson be fetched at once !" he shouted, and two or three gentlemen volunteered to go. " Where the devil are the servants ?" he continued. " These fellows are never in the way when you want them. How was it, my lady, that you allowed yourself to be unattended ?"

A painful flush rose to Lady Slade's face, she trembled all over and was obliged to sit down on the stump of a tree to prevent herself falling.

" Come, come, Slade !" exclaimed Plantagenet Jones, " don't you see Lady Slade is utterly unable to walk ? Stop here with her, girls, and I will run across the park and send the carriage." He bustled off, anxious and fussy.

" Reginald dear," murmured Beatrice, after she had drank a glass of water that Jane Jones procured from a stream close by, " Reginald dear, won't you thank our boy's preserver ?"

“God bless my soul ; yes !” he exclaimed, starting and shaking the steward by the hand. “I am so bewildered with it all, I shall forget my own head next. Burton, my good fellow, I owe you a debt of thanks I can never repay. Good God ! if I had lost the boy, I think I should have gone mad. It was plucky of you—deuced plucky. You must come up to the Court and tell me all about it.”

But the steward, who, in spite of the admiring glances cast upon him by half-a-dozen young ladies, shrank nervously from finding himself the hero of the moment, excused himself on account of his dripping garments.

“Hang your clothes ! Stevens can get you a change in a minute. Do you think I care what clothes you wear ? Why, you’ll catch your death of cold, man. You shall go on in the carriage with Lady Slade.”

Robert Burton thanked his master, but persisted in expressing his wish to return to his own home, which, after all, was nearer than the Court.

"Well, if you will be so obstinate, you must have your own way. You will come up soon, Burton ? you will come up soon. By Jove ! but I never heard of such a narrow escape in the whole course of my life !" and the Baronet fell to examining his son, as if he were not quite certain of his identity.

At this juncture the carriage dashed up, with Plantagenet Jones gesticulating violently inside. Both he and Dr. Wilson sprang out, and Beatrice and her child were quickly conveyed to the Court, where a warm bath and skilful treatment soon restored the youthful hero to his former lively condition, and his agitated mother to tranquillity of mind.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIFTY POUND NOTE.

BREAKFAST at Chesham Court. Sir Reginald, red and smiling, at the bottom of the table ; Beatrice, pale and silent, at the top ; the rest of the party at the sides, voracious and loquacious.

“Plucky fellow, Burton,” remarks a young cornet of hussars, on a visit for a week.

“Wevy,” assents Captain Vivian, who has been staying with the Slades in order to be near Maria Jones, to whom he has just been betrothed.

The topic of conversation was, of course,

the rescue of the young heir from drowning, by the steward the day before.

"Yes, by gad, it was a plucky thing!" says Sir Reginald, carving some cold game. "If it had not been for Burton, I'm afraid it would have been all up with Master Francis."

At which observation the mother grows paler still.

"You will have to do something for him, Slade; something handsome, you know," interrupts a gentleman well known in the literary world. "What a nice morsel it would have been for the press, if they had happened to have heard of it. 'Alarming accident! Gallant rescue of the infant heir of Sir Reginald Slade! Affecting scene between the preserver and the parents!' Eh!"

"I'm devilish glad they know nothing about it," replies the Baronet, with a slight frown. "Nothing a man hates so much as to see his name in print against his will."

The Baronet's enthusiasm about his

steward had slightly decreased since the preceding day, and he regarded the matter with somewhat of his usual cool philosophy.

"I hope little Francis has quite recovered from the unpleasant effects of his bath?" remarks a spinster of uncertain age, turning towards Lady Slade, with an appearance of deep concern. (She would not have cared if the child had been drowned, save for the inconvenience of seeking fresh quarters at a few hours' notice.)

"He is quite well, thank you, with the exception of a little cold," replies Lady Slade; "we are keeping him in bed to-day, and Dr. Wilson assures me he will be all right to-morrow."

"You must take care, my dear, slight colds often produce very serious consequences. No doubt the little fellow was overheated, and the sudden chill might——"

"There is no reason for alarm, really."

"Well, my dear, you know best, you are

his mother, and of course must be the best judge ; but I should take care," says the elderly female, who was one of that amiable brigade, familiarly known as Job's comforters. She could not, however, succeed in alarming Beatrice.

"Children are like cats, they have nine lives," growls the happy father of eight; "there is no accounting for the hairbreadth escapes my young ones have had."

"The question is," broke in the young cornet, who was extremely generous with other people's money; "what is to be done for the valiant steward? I suppose you won't go the length of voting him a service of plate, or a gold medal, Slade after the fashion of the Royal Humane Society?"

"A gold fiddlestick," laughed Sir Reginald. "I shall do nothing of the sort."

"But you will have to do something, Slade," cried the literary gentleman, with an author's predilection for rewarding merit.

"It will be expected of you, you know—you must raise his salary—or——"

"Raise his salary? Not I—what should I do that for, pray? He has quite as much as Jones's man now—who has six times my income. I cannot afford to throw my money away like that."

"Perhaps, Reginald, if you made Mr. Burton a small present of money, it would be best," remarked Miss Catherine Hyde, turning to the Baronet; "people in his walk of life generally prefer money to anything else; and you will acquit yourself of any further obligation."

"A capital idea, Catherine. I think you are right," replied her brother-in-law. "I will give him a fifty pound note. Burton is a very good fellow, and I want his assistance now in many ways. I shall be seeing him in a day or two, and will pop the money in his hand. You have taken quite a load off my mind, my dear. It is not pleasant to feel oneself under obligations to one's servants."

Beatrice looked uneasily at her husband, a faint blush stealing over her face.

"I scarcely think Mr. Burton takes it in the light of an obligation," she said, timidly. "I do not think you ought to put it in that way, Reginald."

"No, indeed," exclaimed the literary gentleman, "I should imagine he considered it an honour. In the olden time, servants willingly volunteered their lives in the service of their masters. I should say it was the proudest feather in Mr. Burton's cap—the day he saved Sir Reginald's son."

"You may depend upon it, Burton will like the money all the same," laughed the young hussar; "it is the only question the lower orders can understand."

"I always find it so," said Catherine Hyde; "it is no use talking to the poor about religion, unless you can give them something at the same time. You are sure to observe an uneasy expression on their faces, that never subsides till you have pulled out your purse."

"Ah, you do not go the right way to work, my dear," cried the spinster lady, after the laugh raised by Catherine's statement had subsided. "I have been in the habit of district visiting for years, and I can assure you, they never get a penny out of me—you are too kind-hearted, Miss Hyde—they know before I enter their doors, they need not attempt such a thing."

"Well, Beatrice," said her husband, "I think you had better have Burton up here, and give him the note yourself; you can put it in any light you please, so that I get rid of it," he added, with a laugh.

Lady Slade was secretly delighted, that her husband had delegated her to convey to Mr. Burton the expression of their mutual thanks. With her innate delicacy of feeling, the consciousness that Mr. Burton might not quite like Sir Reginald's brusque manner of rewarding the bravery of his steward, affected her painfully, and she was more than glad to think she would be able to soften, if not obliterate,

any unpleasantness in the matter. For terrified and agitated as she was on the preceding afternoon, she yet perfectly remembered the grave courtesy, the respectful yet tender kindness of manner, that might have belonged to a man of far higher station than her husband's steward.

His courage, his promptitude, his shrinking delicacy when praised, were all noted by the grateful mother, who thought within herself no reward could be too high or too great for the preserver of her child.

But Beatrice had seen quite enough of the world, and of her husband, to avoid publishing her sentiments openly; she waited till after lunch, till Catherine came into her dressing-room.

"I am going to drive to Mr. Burton's this afternoon, Catherine," she said. "I cannot rest until I have thanked him again for having saved Francis's life."

The beauty opened her large blue eyes in astonishment. "Going to drive to Mr. Burton's, Beatrice, to-day?"

"Yes, to-day," replied Lady Slade, rather pettishly; "is there anything extraordinary in that? I want you to go with me, dear, I do not like to go alone."

"I should think you did not," said Catherine, with a proud toss of her aristocratic little head; "the fact of Lady Slade going to visit her husband's steward is rather *outré*, is it not?"

"I see nothing *outré* about it—under the circumstances; it is the most natural thing I should do."

"I am sorry I cannot accompany you, Beatrice; I am going to 'All Saints.'"

"'All Saints!' it is always 'All Saints!' whenever I ask you to go anywhere with me, you are always going to church, Catherine."

"Could I be going anywhere better?" questioned Miss Hyde, with a look of pious amazement, though a blush overspread her beautiful face. "Perhaps if you went a little oftener to Church, you would not cavil so much at others."

“ Perhaps I should not. Anyhow there is a duty to one’s neighbour as well as to God. And I mean to drive to Mr. Burton’s to-day, and acquit myself of that part of my religious obligations.”

Beatrice could be determined enough if she chose, and Catherine’s fanatical observances irritated her more than she cared to allow.

“ You can do just as you please,” replied Miss Hyde, coolly, glancing over her shoulder at her sweeping train. “ But I think you are very wrong, Beatrice, to say nothing of your lowering yourself as Reginald’s wife, by condescending to visit his dependants. You heard him express his wish that the steward should come here to you.”

Lady Slade coloured angrily. “ I do not care what Reginald said,” she exclaimed. “ In some instances I think myself quite as capable of judging what is right as he; and in this case, I feel it my duty to show my gratitude to the man

—not the steward, who saved my child—by calling at his house ; he has a sister or a mother there, I believe.”

“As you please,” replied the placid Catherine, not in the least disturbed by her sister’s angry words ; “only I must decline to accompany you. That class of persons is neither to my mind nor my taste. I cannot get on with them. I can manage the poor—they never forget themselves, nor their position ; but tradespeople and stewards are utterly out of my line,” said the proud beauty, adjusting the strings of her bonnet in the looking-glass. “You had better take Miss Travers or Mrs. Le Geyt (the two lady visitors at the Court) with you.”

“I shall take neither. I shall call for Rosamond Etheridge ; she knows the Burtons, I believe.”

“Very possibly ; the Burtons are just the sort of people Rosamond Etheridge would know,” sneered Catherine.

She had long been jealous of her

sister's affection for Rosamond, whose blunt straightforwardness she could never understand, and whose utter disregard of conventionalities shocked all her ideas of propriety and good taste. Catherine dearly loved her sister, but the pride which was inherent in her, caused many a coolness between them, which the warm heart of the elder would gladly have averted ; even now, Catherine felt a sort of compunction for the slighting words she had spoken, and she put her arms round her sister's waist, kissing her fondly as she did so.

" There, Beatrice, you must not mind what I say. I felt a little vexed at your making such a fuss about a common man, when Stanley Harrington would have done as much if he had only got there in time. I am sure," she added, " I can never be sufficiently grateful to God for sparing our little Francis, and I think it ought to be made the subject of a special thanksgiving on Sunday. I do not begrudge Mr. Burton his fifty pounds ; and I would go with you

willingly if he were sick or ill ; but it is to God, not to man, our praises and thanks should first be given."

"Certainly, dear," replied the mollified Beatrice. "You surely do not think I have not thanked Him a thousand times, for His infinite mercy in sparing my precious child. I am much obliged to you, Catherine, for reminding me of my duty. We will have a special prayer of thanksgiving said on Sunday. I will ask Reginald to speak to the Rector about it."

"I will tell Mr. Hope what you wish," said Catherine, blushing. "I am going to church this afternoon."

Lady Slade was quite as pleased to have Rosamond Etheridge with her as she would have been to have had her own sister. Perhaps after all, Catherine was right, and it was an exceptional thing to do, when she could so easily have had the steward up at the Court ; but 'circumstances alter cases,' as the school books say, and

Lady Slade had a secret intuition that she would be able to convey both her present and her thanks to the steward in his own home better than she could at Chesham Court.

Rosamond was wild with delight, when her beloved Lady Slade called for her at the cottage. She had sobbed herself to sleep at night, still entertaining the haunting fear that Beatrice, in spite of her asseverations to the contrary, might attach some blame to her thoughtless little friend.

The scene on the river was for ever before her—the boat, the lazy, good-natured Stanley, the swarthy gipsy lady, and the fair-haired child, those waving woods, those undulating fields, the glorious sunlight falling all around them; and then, that other scene, when all the sunlight faded into sudden darkness—the baby struggling with the rushing waters; the desperate fight for life or death. Often in the night did Rosamond Etheridge start with horror, as she fancied she beheld the dark eyes of

Mrs. Harrington regarding her with the same expression of malignant hate and fiendish triumph they wore in the boat. She shuddered, as the conviction forced itself on her brain, growing stronger every moment, that that subtle wicked woman would have *murdered* the child, had it been in her power to do so. For one thing only did she give her credit—Mrs. Harrington did not intentionally push the boy overboard, (though after circumstances made it hard for her to realize even this); but that she tried to prevent her husband saving him, not as she pretended from any love for himself, but in order that the child might be dead before he could reach it, was as evident to Rosamond's excited imagination as was her own existence.

But why? For what reason? Mrs. Harrington and Lady Slade were considered inseparable friends; and as for Sir Reginald ——, even in the darkness, a hot flush swept over the girl's pale face. Could it be true? Was human nature so

desperately wicked as that? Rosamond tossed and moaned, but to no one dared she confide her thoughts. What could she, a weak powerless girl, do, to save her friend from the treachery surrounding her? How could she give her a hint? And if that hint should prove incorrect, what misery might she not bring on Beatrice's already tortured heart? Rosamond, made wise by love, was no stranger to the unhappy life Lady Slade led at home; true, Beatrice said nothing, but no one could be long an inmate of that house without remarking the cold indifference with which Sir Reginald treated his wife—the utter absence of sympathy between the loving Beatrice and her surroundings. Rosamond's heart ached for the gentle lady whom she saw pining away in her gilded cage; and she fully realized how terrible would have been the shock had her only child been carried home a corpse.

Robert Burton was busy in his garden when the Slades' carriage drove up. Pas-

sionately fond of flowers, the cultivation of the little plot of ground in front of the farmstead was both recreation and amusement to him, and occupied many an hour that might otherwise have been spent in the coffee-room at the "Black Eagle." Although any of the men under his command would have been only too glad to give him their assistance, and so curry favour with the steward ; Robert Burton chose to plant and grow his flowers himself, tending them gently and carefully, as if they were children, and watching with delight their budding and their bloom. The love of nature was inseparable from his existence. The voice of the mountains, the rivers, and the plains, spoke far more audibly to his soul than did the thriftless conversation of animate beings ; the one was full of treachery and deceit, of money-grubbing, jealousy, and pride ; the other of the truth, and the grandeur, and the beauty, of God ; of a life whose hopes and aims were higher and better than building houses and culti-

vating lands, or storing gold for future descendants to squander. If Robert Burton had been born in another sphere of life, he would most assuredly have been a philanthropist; as it was, he was to a certain extent isolated from his fellow-creatures, having thoughts and feelings far above the class with whom he mixed, and preferring the silent communings with nature, to the noisy gatherings of men with whom he had little sympathy and less love.

There was not one among the well-to-do farmers or rich tradesmen in and about Rubestown, who would not have been glad to see Sir Reginald's steward at their houses, either as a friend or a suitor for their daughter's hand. He was looked upon by all as a rising man, and his antecedents would have been totally ignored had he let them rest himself, but he clung to the primitive simplicity of his early life as tenaciously as he did to the principles therein inculcated. He would speak of the time when he was a simple farm bailiff, and

his mother attended to the duties of the house with only a little girl as help, with as much unconcern as he treated an interview with the great London lawyers, who were Sir Reginald's agents, or indeed Sir Reginald himself. The knowledge that all the fine property that comprised Sir Reginald's estate was under his sole management and supervision, and that he had been regarded by the late Sir Geoffrey, (and was now by his son), as a man of undoubted honour and probity, caused no more vanity in the steward's mind than the conscious and pardonable pride of having done his duty to his master as far as in him lay; promotion with him meant merely a more careful supervision.

Simple in their habits, simple in their tastes, Robert Burton and his mother lived the primitive life of most country farmers, and eschewed all attempts to draw them out of their modest routine. Every visitor to the farm was welcome, but the dressed-up wives and daughters of the Rubes-

townites found little to attract them in the quiet, almost quakerish, simplicity of the steward's mother : and the men, with rare exceptions, got tired, after business was discussed, of talking to a man who broached strange, new-fangled ideas, and who got most of his learning out of books, the names of which they had not even so much as heard.

Robert Burton had nothing of a misanthrope about him, he enjoyed life as well as the best of his associates, and, always alive to the calls of humanity, he was ever a ready and sympathizing friend.

Raised above his equals by the nobility of soul, which is God's free gift to man, Robert Burton sought and found life's truest philosophy ; to be contented with the station in which he was placed, and to find in the perfect accomplishment of the duties of that station his best and highest pleasure. What he did with his money was a puzzle to a great many inquiring souls. Frugal, without meanness, he certainly never spent

half the five hundred a year which Sir Reginald gave him, and he never bought houses or land, which was the laudable ambition of most of the farmers around. Perhaps some of the clerks in Jones's bank could have solved the mystery had they dared to speak. Anyhow, the fact that many a large cheque, bearing the signature of Robert Burton, found its way into the far-off manufacturing city, where the dead Lucy lay and the hard-working weavers toiled, excited the astonishment of those dapper young gentlemen, who always smiled graciously ' *à la Jones* ' whenever Sir Reginald's steward entered the bank.

So Robert Burton pursued the even tenor of his way, and grew his roses and his lilies, and was as proud of his little garden as the head-gardener at Chesham Court was of his parterres ; nay, more, the steward often laughingly declared his natural grown flowers were sweeter and lovelier far than the stiff scentless exotics which constituted that worthy's glory.

He was digging in his garden on that particular afternoon in his shirt-sleeves, it being too hot to work in his coat, a light straw hat tilted carelessly over his brow. His thoughts were far away with the sweet woman and little child whose life he had saved, wondering how they were, hoping the excitement of the previous day had not caused Lady Slade to be ill. Although his morning's duty had taken him very near the Court ; with the natural shyness of his character he had abstained from making any inquiries, feeling assured that had there been any ill effects from the accident he would have been certain to have heard of it.

During the last three years the steward had seen, unnoticed by herself, a great deal of his lovely mistress, and the impression that she had made upon him on her first arrival was strengthened and heightened by time into something little short of worship : her sweet ways, her winning manners, her gentle courtesy, all had their due effect on the susceptible mind of the steward,

who, with the image of his dead Lucy engraven on his heart, fancied he beheld her tender spirit beaming out of the eyes of Lady Slade.

Robert Burton was very thoughtful. In his responsible position as steward, he could not but be aware that for a long time things had not been going on as they should. Two-thirds of the property was already heavily mortgaged, and this very day he had received notice from the London agents that some more of the timber must be felled and sold to meet the increasing demands of their clients. What Sir Reginald wanted with all this money he could not conceive. He was not blind to the fact that Sir Reginald was gambling and betting very largely, but still the man must be mad to be draining his estate to this fearful extent. The good old Sir Geoffrey would turn in his grave if he only knew. Robert Burton made up his mind, as he knelt down and carefully tied up some choice carnations, that the next opportunity

he had he would venture to speak to Sir Reginald on the subject. Surely the baronet could not be aware. After all, what was it him, to Robert Burton? He had saved sufficient money to keep his mother and himself independent for the rest of their days. If these aristocrats chose to throw their money and estates away in this reckless manner, he could not prevent it.

But for *her* sake, for her sake.

Almost simultaneously with the thought, his mother burst upon his meditations.

"Robert! Robert! t'squire's carriage is coming up this way, and me leddy is in it herself; I'm sure it's coming here. Put on thy coat, Robert; thou would'st never let her leddyship see thee like that, sure'lie."

"Why should she be coming here?" cried Robert Burton, struggling into his coat, while a flush overspread his dark face.

"Why, may be to speak about the child, it's just like her gracious self to do so. See, I'm right," as Lady Slade's carriage

stopped at the gate, and the old lady bustled up, bowing and curtseying, to open it for her mistress.

“How do you do, Mrs. Burton?”

A vision of bright shimmering silk, a pale beautiful face, swept up the little flagged path that led to the farmhouse.

“Is Mr. Burton at home? Ah, yes, I see him,” cried Lady Slade, as she caught sight of the steward, hat in hand, standing amongst his roses, near the door.

He came forward as she spoke, while Rosamond, lingering behind, threw her arms round the old woman’s neck, and covered her cherry cheeks with kisses.

“You dear old soul; are you not very glad?—Oh, you don’t know how proud we all are of Mr. Burton!”

Mrs. Burton struggled, simpering and smiling, out of the girl’s warm embrace.

“Yes, yes, my dear; but hush, my leddy is speaking now.”

“She doesn’t want us,” exclaimed the wise Rosamond. “Let us go into the house,

good mother, I want to look at the dairy and the chickens, and—strawberries are over now, I suppose ?”

“Long ago, Miss Rosamond—bless my heart, what a bonny young leddy thee’s grown ; and how’s Sir Francis, my dearie?”

“He isn’t Sir Francis yet, Mrs. Burton,” laughed Rosamond ; “Master Francis is as well as he ever was, and proposing to have another trip on the water : not with my consent ; he was nearly the death of me yesterday and himself too, had it not been for your brave son.”

The good old lady coloured with delight, and led the way by a side walk to the dairy, where, I am shocked to say, Rosamond was soon absorbed in a bowl of thick cream.

Robert Burton scarcely knew whether he was dreaming or awake, when his gentle mistress, a smile upon her lips, tears of gratitude in her eyes, laid her delicate gloved hand in his. “I hope I have not disturbed you, Mr. Burton,” she said, in

her soft pathetic voice ; " I could not rest till I had again thanked you for saving my darling's life. Sir Reginald—I—we all owe you a debt we can never repay."

" You owe me no thanks, my lady," replied the steward, trembling in every limb, at the touch of those small taper fingers. " I am only too proud and happy to feel I have rendered you a service."

" But we do owe you both gratitude and thanks," said Lady Slade ; " your modesty and kindness does not acquit us of our obligation. I was so much alarmed and agitated yesterday, I really could not express to you all I felt."

Robert Burton looked at her with much anxiety. " I trust your ladyship feels no ill effects from the shock ?"

" No, thank God," she replied smiling, " terrified as I was, the revulsion of feeling on hearing my boy was safe, has I believe saved my life, I think I should have died had he been drowned."

A sudden pallor overspread her face.

"Your ladyship is not well, will you condescend to come in doors, and rest for a little time?" said Mr. Burton, with respectful concern.

"No, thank you, if you will allow me I prefer to sit here," said Lady Slade, sitting down on a rustic seat beneath the fragrant shade of a walnut tree. "I am so fond of the open air, I almost live in the park. How nice your flowers are, Mr. Burton—how sweet they smell."

The steward looked pleased at her praises of his favourites. "I have a few good roses, my lady," he said; "but they are nearly all over now, it is the heliotrope and mignonette that smell so sweet."

"I do not fancy we have any so good at the Court," she said, letting her dark eyes wander over the little garden. "You must give Chapman some of your cuttings, Mr. Burton."

"If you will permit me, I will send your ladyship some of the plants."

"Oh, no, pray do not," cried Beatrice,

quickly; "I should be sorry to deprive you of them."

"It would not deprive me, it would be such a pleasure, such an honour," he stammered nervously.

Lady Slade was nervous also; but her agitation arose from a very different source. How could she give this man who stood before her now, so respectful, yet so dignified, in spite of his ill-cut clothes, the fifty pound note she held in her hand? She wished with all her heart she had never come near; why had she been so foolish as to interfere with her husband's affairs? What business had she to meddle in it at all? What could she say to a man who received her as if she were a royal princess, and ended by offering her flowers? She thought she had better return, and send the money afterwards in a little note—or she would leave it on the table in the porch, or give it to his mother. It was all very unpleasant and very disagreeable, and Beatrice began to regret she had ever

come near the farm, and wished Rosamond would return, so that they might go at once.

Meanwhile, Robert Burton, hat in hand, stood before his mistress, watching the various emotions flit over her face, little dreaming how nearly those emotions affected himself. She looked so lovely then, with a far away troubled look in the soft dark eyes, so like the dead and gone Lucy, that Robert Burton could have knelt in very madness at her feet, and worshipped the living prototype of his dear lost love.

It was well for both that they could neither of them read each other's thoughts: for Robert Burton's vanity would have been sorely wounded; and Lady Slade — well, she would certainly not have held out her hand, with the smile and blush that accompanied it, as she said, "I think I must be going now, Mr. Burton, if you will kindly tell Miss Etheridge I am waiting. Sir Regi-

nald asked me—wished me, as I was coming here, to give you this.” She placed the fifty-pound note in his hand as she spoke.

Robert Burton looked surprised. “Sir Reginald wished you, my lady, to give me this?” he said, dreamingly turning it over and over in his hand.

“It is but a small expression of our gratitude,” explained Beatrice hastily, looking at him with the hazel eyes full of tremulous anxiety; “it is nothing to what we mean to do. I know we can never really repay.—Oh, I hope you will not be offended.”

He had turned away from her in the first impulse of grieved surprise—this then was the end of it all! His grand aspirations—his quixotic dreams—his longing to give his life for the gentle woman before him; a question of pounds, shillings, and pence; a debt to be repaid with money, like any hired menial on her estates; what a madman he had been! Her

pleading tones recalled him to himself—
“Offended—I—how dare I be offended?”
He spoke proudly, yet bitterly.

“You are offended,” said Beatrice; “but indeed, Mr. Burton, you do us wrong; nothing was farther from our thoughts, Sir Reginald’s and mine, than to pain or wound you in any way; we feel nothing could fully express our sense of gratitude to the rescuer of our boy;” tears were in the brown eyes now—“and Sir Reginald fancied——”

Robert Burton had regained his self-possession: “Pray forgive me!” he cried. “Your ladyship is very kind; the service I had the honour to render you does not deserve all this generous condescension; your visit alone is more than I deserve; but as for money, I never thought of it—I did not expect—I cannot take it.”

He held out the note as he spoke, and Beatrice’s fingers closed mechanically upon it—still she hesitated; “I wish you would think again,” she murmured. “I am afraid Sir Reginald will be grieved.”

"Sir Reginald will understand, my lady," said the steward gravely; "it is very generous of him to offer; but the salary he gives me is amply sufficient for all my wants. Pray let me have the satisfaction of thinking I have done at least one action in my life that was not simply duty." A faint melancholy smile stole over his dark handsome face.

Lady Slade sighed, but she put the note back into her little purse.

"I will not press you; you have a noble heart, Mr. Burton. I hope you will always be our friend."

She gave him her hand again as she spoke, and for the third time that afternoon Robert Burton felt the pressure of those warm clinging fingers. They thrilled to his very heart.

"I shall always be your ladyship's devoted servant," he exclaimed earnestly. "God grant you may never need my services again; but, if ever you do, command me."

Did a prescience of the future cross the minds of these two, as they stood under the fragrant walnut tree, amongst the roses and the lilies of the steward's garden? Did not her request and his reply sound very like a vow given and received, as the deep earnest words floated away on the wind—floated away higher and higher, till they reached the clouds, where pitying angel eyes looked down upon the pair.

“Wouldn't take the fifty-pound note!” cried Sir Reginald, when his wife repeated the conversation to him in his dressing-room that evening. “By Gad! Burton is a queer fellow; it shows he has never known the want of money, my dear.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NECKLACE OF PEARLS.

“IT was great fun,” as Rosamond expressed it, going round canvassing: the deference shown by the influential voters, the half-dubious, half-wondering expression on the stolid faces of the working classes, and their final consent to give a plumper for the great banker, was a source of infinite amusement to Lady Slade, who, with her usual good nature readily accompanied Maria Jones in her *début* as canvasser for her father.

The fair intercessors were received with great courtesy by all the Rubestownites, and it was only Low Church, very Low Church indeed, where they met with a

positive refusal. To judge by the number of names they had on their lists each day, Plantagenet Jones's success seemed an undoubted fact ; as it was, he declared there was no occasion whatever for the money he expended in agents, committees, placards, and handbills, and all the other accessories of a county election. The agricultural element were with him almost to a man. Born and reared on their respective estates, the same principles of strict Conservatism that had actuated their grandfathers descended to the sons ; and they would no more have thought of voting contrary to their landlords than of abandoning their profession as farmers for some other calling or trade ; they stuck to the old traditions and the old loyalties with the pertinacity of burrs, and shook their heads at the broad views entertained and expounded by the Liberal candidate, Mr. Armstrong.

Free trade, reform, and universal suffrage was Greek to them ; the old constitution had always done very well, and they

didn't want any new-fangled reform down there. The only thing they did understand was plenty of beer and open public-houses, and the renewal of a lease or two that was nearly expired.

It was rather different in the town itself. The working-classes and artizans, headed by the dissenting body, all determined to vote for Mr. Armstrong, who guaranteed them no end of fine things should he be returned to Parliament, and was quite as liberal with his beer and his money as his rival, Plantagenet Jones.

Lady Slade and her young friends knew very little, and cared less, about the different politics of the combatants. She had been told that Conservatism was the proper view for a lady to hold, and Conservative she was accordingly. One little circumstance, when she heard it, shook her belief in its thorough immaculateness.

Sir Reginald Slade, going one day into the bank, found Plantagenet Jones, as usual, excited and talkative.

"Good morning, Sir Reginald ! glad to see you."

"Glad to see you, Jones ; how is the canvassing going on ?"

"Nothing better ! Your wife and my girls have worked wonders. I think there is very little doubt now we shall pull off the race. By-the-bye, Sir Reginald, that man of yours, Burton, refuses to vote ; says he believes in that cad, Armstrong."

"The devil he does !"

"Fact, I assure you. I took it for granted all your people would vote for me ; but it seems the other evening Burton was down at the 'Black Eagle,' and by the living Jingo ! if he didn't go and make a speech proving Armstrong was right, and we were wrong. It's monstrous, Sir Reginald ! monstrous !" and the aggrieved little banker mopped his shining forehead.

"Burton must vote," said Sir Reginald quietly ; "the fellow has been making himself a great deal too officious lately—ever since he pulled little Francis out of the

water ; he came up the other evening, and actually had the impertinence to call me to account about selling the timber. By-the-bye, Jones, I want to see you about those mortgages on the Home Farm. When do they run out ?”

“ I’ll have them looked out for you, Sir Reginald, and see. But, with regard to Burton, I don’t think you will do much good there : he is as obstinate as a mule—talks about liberty of conscience and free will as if he were an Unitarian.”

“ Burton shall vote,” reiterated Sir Reginald, quietly. “ Understands the difference between Tory and Radical, does he ? I’ll see if he understands the difference between Chesham Court and the wide world.”

The next time the steward came up to the Court, after discussing his business, Sir Reginald said to him,—

“ I understand, Burton, you have refused to vote for my friend Plantagenet Jones ; may I ask your reason ?”

The steward flushed, but answered composedly,—

“ You may, Sir Reginald : it is because I object to the present system of government as regards the working man. I hold that any man who has been endowed by his Creator with a soul and brains, has as much right to select a representative in Parliament, as any member of the aristocracy. Why should there be any such thing as monopoly ? Why should a man’s mind run in such a narrow groove, that he is bound to think as he is told, and have no views of his own on the matter ? ”

“ Admirably argued, Mr. Burton,” said Sir Reginald Slade, a glittering smile in his steely blue eyes ; “ you would have made a first rate orator, had your lines been cast in other places ; you are of course for the education of the masses, and extending the franchise, and——”

“ I am for whatever is right and good and true, Sir Reginald,” replied the steward, respectfully. “ I am for straightforwardness and honesty between man and man.”

The aristocrat tapped his white slender fingers impatiently on the table. "And you agree with the way this fellow Armstrong's agents are conducting his canvass; with the bribery and corruption that has bought up the votes from a parcel of ignorant fools, who do not know whether they are standing on their heads or their heels?"

"No sir, I do not," replied Robert Burton, firmly. "I no more agree with the doings of Mr. Armstrong, and his set of rascally attorneys, than I do with the generosity of Mr. Plantagenet Jones, who has opened half the public houses in Rubestown, and will in consequence claim the largest share of votes from the free and independent electors."

"Then if I understand you rightly, you do not intend to vote at all."

"No, Sir Reginald, I do not; I should have been glad, had it been consistent with my principles and conscience, to have given my vote to Mr. Plantagenet Jones, who is

one's fellow citizen, and I consider has a claim on our support ; but his views are not consistent with either my principles or my conscience; and, as I equally disapprove of the disgraceful means by which Mr. Armstrong seeks to obtain an ultimate good, I decline to vote at all."

Sir Reginald looked at his steward for some moments in silence. "Upon my word, Burton," he said at length, "but you are a cool card. Suppose I were to make it clear to your conscience, as you call it, that Chesham Court and her dependencies have always been, and always shall remain, conservative to the backbone, where would be your principles then?"

"Where they have ever been, Sir Reginald, on the side of truth and justice—conservative in what regards my duty to you and your family; free and unfettered as regards my conscience to God. I could go forth into the world a richer and a prouder man, than the individual who

might buy my place, at the price of his own self-respect."

The Baronet shrugged his shoulders: "That's all very fine in theory, Burton; but I don't see the benefit you would get in practice; however, there is no use arguing with a man who entertains such quixotic ideas as you do; you must have your own way, I suppose. I go with you thus far, that the country does require reform of some sort; but how you are to get it, the Lord only knows. As for your Radicals ever doing it, it's all moonshine, my good fellow—moonshine. Once let them get into parliament, and, like Oliver Cromwell, they will be the first to abuse the power they have denounced in others."

Robert Burton's eyes grew sad and thoughtful; he feared there was only too much truth in what Sir Reginald stated.

"I live in hopes," he said, "that future generations will see a very different state of things; when the wrong, the misery, and the oppression, that make this beauti-

ful world an abode for demons to gloat over, will become a thing of the past, and a man will be measured by the good he does, not by the money for which he has never worked, or the rank which has descended to him by law."

"The fellow is as mad as a hatter," said Sir Reginald Slade, as he repeated the conversation that evening at dinner; "a self-opinionated, hair-brained, quixotic fool: talks about his principles and his conscience; where the dickens he got his knowledge from, I don't know; it's no use thinking of him, Jones. I believe he would pack off root and branch, before he would yield a point."

Lady Slade entered very little into political discussions with the independent electors of Rubestown. She drove about with Maria Jones in the great family barouche, painted dark blue for the occasion—the pair of fine stepping fat greys, looking uncommonly like prize oxen, with their flowing streamers and rosettes.

Beatrice had some blue feathers put in her pretty little bonnet, to please Maria Jones, who was blue all over, from her hat and her gloves, down to her very boots.

The ladies had fabricated an endless number of blue and silver favours, which they begged to be allowed to pin with their own fair fingers, on the coats of their supporters, to the great gratification of these worthies.

"Give them a good order, my dear," said Mrs. Stanley Harrington, who occasionally accompanied them in their sorties on the tradesmen; "there is nothing like throwing a bone to the *canaille*. You want the things, of course, and they will never see that in all human probability, you will never require them again."

It was on one of these expeditions, that Lady Slade stopped at the shop of one of the principal jewellers in Rubestown, a man who was secretly suspected of favouring the opposition candidate; though his interests were clearly on the side of the aristocracy. Plantagenet Jones was most

anxious to obtain this man's vote, as there was little doubt many of the better class of tradesmen would be influenced by the opulent jeweller's example. Beatrice was easily persuaded to use her influence, and, woman-like, was nothing loth to have her husband's consent to her selecting some new ornament, to add to her already well-filled jewel-case. Maria and she started on their mission in high spirits, all the more eager, as in this instance their success or failure would be equally productive of a satisfactory result to themselves, and they had little doubt of winning over the goldsmith's vote and interest.

They were not disappointed ; the smiling tradesman received them with every appearance of respectful cordiality, and at once surrendered his conscience into the keeping of the fair Lady Slade. Pleased with their success the delighted Maria expended a small fortune on the purchase of loud jewellery, which she intended for her future *trousseau*, and Beatrice could scarcely get her

away from the brilliant temptations that lay glittering on the counter. Beatrice herself selected a *parure* of pale pink coral, for which she had long been wishing, and was sitting, amused at Maria's lavish expenditure on things apparently of no use to her, when Miss Jones, whose eyes were everywhere, caught sight of a small morocco case, which had not been opened for their inspection.

"Oh, Lady Slade, look here!" she cried, in admiration, as she opened the case—on a cushion of violet velvet, there lay a necklace, composed of three rows of exquisite pearls.

"Oh, how beautiful!" murmured Beatrice, gazing delightedly on the snowy treasures, "What is the price of this lovely necklace, Mr. Sugden?"

"The price was one thousand guineas, my lady," replied the jeweller, stammering and colouring; "but I believe—I believe it is sold."

"Oh, I am so sorry! I never saw any-

thing I liked so much before ; how large, how beautiful they are."

Mr. Sugden held them up in his hand.

"I have no right to betray secrets," he said, smiling ; "but I think Sir Reginald was looking at them this morning, and ——"

Beatrice's heart gave a wild throb of delight. Those magnificent pearls : her husband was buying them,—and for her ! How kind, how good it was of him. Ah ! she recollected it was her birthday in a few days, and Sir Reginald, no doubt, intended them as a surprise. At this evidence of her husband's thoughtful affection, tears of pleasure filled her eyes. She hastily closed the case.

"Take them away, Mr. Sugden," she cried ; "they are far too expensive for me. I dare say Sir Reginald admired them as much as I do ; but they are out of the question at present."

She would not let the jeweller think for a moment she understood his allusion, lest

it might rob her husband of some of his expected pleasure. She turned nervously to look at some rings, fearful lest the man might say any more; and Maria, who was pouncing like a butterfly on every fresh jewel she saw, soon forgot the pearls in the contemplation of gaudier gems.

When the morning of her birthday arrived Beatrice could hardly restrain her agitation; in her own mind she felt certain the pearls were hers, and her heart was filled with love and gratitude to the husband who, under his cold and indifferent demeanour, remembered her with such considerate kindness. But the morning passed away, and Sir Reginald, far from bestowing any present on his expectant wife, did not even appear to recollect that it was her birthday; it was only when she begged him not to forget she had a small party that evening, that he turned, and said—

“ Ah, yes! Beatrice, my dear, it is your birthday, is it not? I remember now that you told me you had invited some friends. Con-

founded nuisance! I wanted to ride over to Springfield and stop the night; the black mare is very ill."

The wife turned to the window to hide her tears. Was that all! was the illness of a horse of such vital consequence that to stop at home with her on her birthday was a nuisance and a bore?

Oh, Reginald! Reginald! and she had been giving him credit, poor foolish woman, for such tender consideration, such delicate kindness. How silly she was to think so much about the pearls. But what did the jeweller mean by his strange behaviour, his hints and innuendoes? She fancied now she must have been mistaken, and the man merely meant that Sir Reginald admired them as much as she did herself.

She checked the tears that rose unbidden to her eyes; she knew any exhibition of feeling on the subject would only make her husband angry, and perhaps cause him to go to Springfield, in spite of her party. She was very desirous that he

should be present to-night, as some of her female acquaintances had not failed to let her know, by significant gestures, and half-mysterious expressions of sympathy, that they were perfectly aware of her husband's indifference and neglect.

The sweet creatures were always ready with little tit-bits of scandal, that their husbands had told them, with which to sting and wound the proud and sensitive Beatrice. Their well-acted "Of course, my dear, Sir Reginald took you to So-and-So's ball," or "Of course, my dear, Sir Reginald went with you to the sea-side this autumn?" (when they knew quite well he had not,) only roused and irritated her into rebellion; and she would have driven the scorpions out of her house, then and there, had she dared.

Oh! the falsity, the treachery, and malice of women! A man may be bad; but his vices, however low, have a largeness and breadth about them, that occasionally redeems them from some of their blackness;

but there is no limit to a woman's capability of wounding, if she only gets the chance. A man deals a blow with one hand, and, ten chances to one, with the other he helps his victim to rise; but a woman pursues hers with unrelenting forgiveness to her dying day.

Poor Beatrice struggled bravely to hide her feelings from the world, and, whatever she might suffer when alone, never allowed her husband's name to be the subject of discussion, even with her most intimate friends. She smiled under the bitterest smart, and it was a proud sweet face that met her guests on the evening of her birthday, a face that utterly concealed the fearful disappointment she had suffered in the morning.

Lady Slade had rather a large dinner party, and a number of people, including the Harringtons, were coming to the evening reception. It had been a very pleasant time; the dinner was quite a success, and Beatrice, pleased and delighted with the

attention she received, the handsome presents brought her by her friends, almost forgot she had had no gift, from the one from whom alone she cared to receive it. She stood smiling beneath the massive chandelier, with the light of the wax tapers falling on her sweet pale face, her soft brown hair.

One by one the later guests arrived, and nearly all were present, when Mrs. Harrington glided gracefully into the room, and came up to shake hands with her hostess and friend. It was one of Mrs. Harrington's whims always to be the last to arrive. She delighted to pit her perfect toilette, her calm repose, against the hot flushed faces and crushed robes of her rivals, and to find compensation for anything she might have missed, in the admiration of the men, the undisguised envy of the women around her. She swept up now, the undulating folds of her mauve satin dress, with its trimmings of costly lace,

trailing serpent-like behind her, and she stood behind Lady Slade, in the full flood of the waxen lights, almost before Beatrice was aware she was in the room.

Then as Lady Slade turned, with the impulsive pleasure she always met the woman she deemed her best and favourite friend, she started with a low cry of pain.

For on the dark neck of the brunette was the fac simile of the necklet of pearls that she had seen in Mr. Sugden's shop, and which, until that morning, she had thought would have been her own. The movement was so involuntary, her expression of pained surprise so faint, it was scarcely noticeable ; but Isabel Harrington both saw and heard.

"Are you ill, dearest Beatrice?" she cried, as she caressingly clasped the cold trembling fingers of her friend. "Why do you not sit down? See, darling, there is an ottoman close by the window ; I'm afraid you have been fatiguing yourself too much this evening."

Beatrice mechanically allowed Mrs. Harrington to lead her to her seat, while her busy brain throbbed with its agonising thoughts. Those pearls on Isabel's neck,—Sir Reginald. What could it all mean? Mrs. Harrington noticed her fascinated glances.

"You are looking at my pearls," she said, with a little laugh. "Are they not beautiful? They are the gift of a very old and dear friend. I wish I could tell you who it is, but I'm pledged to secrecy."

Beatrice looked her calmly in the face. "I was surprised," she said, "for I saw some exactly like them in Mr. Sugden's shop about a week ago."

"Did you, really? what a curious coincidence! I fancied mine were quite unique; but I shall not let that depreciate their value in my eyes. That depends on the donor, does it not, dear?" and Isabel Harrington shot a rapid glance at Beatrice from out of her dark, smiling eyes.

The unhappy wife would have left her

on the spot without saying a word ; but the thought that her suspicions after all might prove incorrect, and if so, would draw upon herself the condemnation of her husband for groundless jealousy, besides quarrelling with the woman who professed to be her greatest friend, checked her first impulse of indignation. She gave some cold reply, which the little lady did not appear to notice, being deep in flirtation with the men who already surrounded her chair.

There was one who saw this little episode, who with the quick intuition of love knew there was more beneath the surface than transpired above.

Rosamond Etheridge saw Lady Slade's start of astonishment, the coldness with which she received Mrs. Harrington's demonstrative caresses, and her whole soul rose in arms against that dangerous coquette. She felt that Lady Slade was, for once, on guard. As Beatrice approached her, their eyes met—the look of utter anguish in the one, of passionate love and sympathy in

the other—told each the other's secret. Lady Slade stopped and pressed the warm hand held out to her, gazing mournfully, yet proudly, into the young pitying eyes.

“Beatrice! oh, dear Beatrice!”

“Hush, Rosamond! Not one word,” cried Beatrice, hastily. “Give me your love, dear girl, but do not speak to me, for pity's sake.”

She passed amongst her guests, pale, but smiling still, and her loving little friend wondered to see the calmness and serenity with which she bore, and concealed, the wound she was certain she had received.

High-spirited and impulsive, Rosamond would have felt inclined, had she been in Lady Slade's place, to have cut the aggressor dead before all her friends, let the consequences be what they might. But the foolish Rosamond forgot that by so doing, Lady Slade would have only betrayed her own weakness, and left Mrs. Harrington mistress of the situation, since Sir Reginald would, in courtesy, have been

forced to protect his guest from open insult, even at the expense of his wife's dignity. Rosamond little knew how, beneath that calm smiling demeanour, the fires of jealous rage burned at Lady Slade's heart; how she was determined, should her suspicions prove correct, never to pass another night under Sir Reginald's roof. It was this determination, then, that impelled her, after her guests had departed, and she and her husband were alone, to face him boldly, hiding her anger behind her white proud face.

"I am glad that is over!"

The tones of her voice were so unlike the usually gentle Beatrice, that Sir Reginald looked up. They were in the smoking room, where Sir Reginald was enjoying his nightly cigar, and his wife stood before him, like an avenging spirit, in her dressing-gown, her long hair streaming over her shoulders.

"What is over, my dear? Your party? I thought you appeared to enjoy yourself immensely."

"Appearances are sometimes deceitful."

"Doubtless they are. What has happened to ruffle your plumage to-night, my fair wife?" He spoke in a bantering tone, smiling at her as she stood there, indignant and reproachful. "Were any of the women better dressed than yourself?"

"As if I cared if they were!" she cried, with a proud little toss of her head. Then, with sudden contradiction: "Yes, one woman was: Mrs. Harrington."

"That is not at all unusual, is it?" he asked, coolly. "That little woman goes in for an immense amount of dress; I wonder Harrington can afford it. But she has style: deuced good style, too." He sat puffing away at his cigar with the utmost composure, not a muscle moving, not a quiver of the eyelids before her searching gaze.

"I did not notice her style, I only looked at her *pearls*."

"Pearls! Did she wear pearls?"

He was more provokingly indifferent

than ever, letting the smoke out of his mouth in a long lazy cloud, and watching it as it curled upon the air. Beatrice felt as if she were going mad.

“Do you mean to tell me you did not notice them?” she exclaimed, passionately; “you must have seen them, Reginald.”

He looked at her this time in evident surprise. “I tell you I did not see them. Do you suppose I look at everything a lady has on, like you women do? men have something else to think about, my dear.”

“But you must have seen them,” repeated poor Beatrice, in her terrible excitement, anxious yet dreading to have her fears confirmed; “they were so large, so beautiful; and she said they were given to her by a very dear friend.”

“Lucky little woman,” cried the Baronet, carefully removing the white ash from the end of his cigar; “I wish I had a very dear friend, who would make me presents. I am sorry I did not observe them, my dear, since you appear to think I ought.

I tell you what, though : I saw some pearls at Sugden's the other day, that beat all I have ever seen in my life ; you should ask him to show them to you, Beatrice, but you must be quick : I fancy he told me they were sold."

Lady Slade looked at her husband in stupid bewilderment. What did it all mean ? That was no guilty face that met hers, with its steady blue eyes looking straight into her own. There was no flush, no hesitating : the cool repose so characteristic of Sir Reginald's manner, was never more his own than now. Then, his remark about the jeweller, his wish that she should see the pearls ; this confirmation of her previous suspicion that she had accused him unjustly in her mind. Still, she was not convinced.

" I have seen them," she said, calmly and slowly, letting her words fall one by one as she spoke. " And, to the best of my belief, they are the same pearls that Mrs. Harrington was wearing to-night."

Sir Reginald rose from his seat, standing on the hearthrug before the fire in the truly British manner men affect.

"You don't say so," he exclaimed. "Who the devil (beg pardon, Beatrice,) has she got to give her those? Why Sugden told me they were worth at least a thousand guineas."

Sir Reginald's expression of unaffected astonishment completely disarmed his wife's suspicions. She sighed heavily, as if a load had been taken off her heart, and laid her head on the tall back of a chair as if in thought.

"So my good little wife does not approve of ladies receiving presents, except from their husbands," said the Baronet, after a pause, during which time Beatrice had been accusing herself of all kinds of enormities against her husband, and wondering he did not suspect her jealousy.

"Well, that is Stanley's look out—not ours. If he chooses to let his wife do so, I don't see that you can quarrel with her for wearing them. Besides, my dear, you

do not know who it was that gave them. It might have been some relative ; or at all events some one who had the right—if you cut your friends for such things as these, you will not have many left, Beatrice.”

He laughed so gaily, so amusedly, Beatrice reproached herself for her suspicions. She looked up.

“ I have no intention of cutting Mrs. Harrington ; and I wish I had said nothing about it,” she murmured, nestling caressingly to his side. “ It was the strange coincidence, Reginald.”

“ Well, it was only natural,” replied Sir Reginald, kissing her kindly. He had evidently not the slightest idea she had been connecting the circumstance with him in any way. “ I suppose, if the truth were known, you were jealous of her finery. Oh, Beatrice—Beatrice, I had no idea there was so much envy in your composition. You must get her to wear them again some day, and let me have a look at these wonderful pearls.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE ELECTION.

NEVER since Rubestown had been in existence, had it ever presented such a scene as it did at the election. That usually quiet little city had all the appearance of a fair; or, to speak somewhat more correctly, as if a fair and festival had coalesced, and were holding high carnival together.

Besides the navvies, agricultural labourers, and idlers of all classes, who thronged the streets; a number of carriages, filled with well-dressed women, each wearing the respective colours of the candidates, drove up and down, depositing their fair

freight at some house from whose windows a good view of the hustings could be obtained.

The nomination day was a grand triumph for Plantagenet Jones, the show of hands being so overwhelmingly in his favour, that his return seemed certain. His speech, and those of his friends and supporters, were recorded in the *Rubestown Mercury*; and the canvassing progressed to such an extent, as could not fail to place Mr. Jones at the head of the poll.

The hustings were erected in the Market Place, at the top of the High Street, where the two rival hotels, the "Black Eagle" and the "Royal George," flanked either side the square; and the Bank, a handsome Corinthian edifice, faced them at right angles. The principal streets were decorated with a liberal quantity of bunting, representing the rival factions; and the opposition parties saluted each other from their respective windows, uttering their various opinions and sentiments in choice and terse language.

Bands of music paraded the streets, both men and instruments decorated with flowing streamers, each striving to outdo the other in the performance of their harmonious duty, which was anything but harmonious whenever they happened to meet.

Whenever Mr. Armstrong, the Liberal candidate, attempted to address his friends and supporters, a most awful yelling and hooting accompanied his endeavours, while Plantagenet Jones was permitted to speak with but few and feeble interruptions. It is true, that some inquisitive individual, wearing the Radical orange, would from time to time inquire the rate of discount at the bank ; how Jones had made his money ; and an enormous placard, representing Plantagenet in the garb of a clown, stuffing his pockets with a string of money bags, in lieu of sausages ; and an inscription, " Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief," &c., was hoisted, in front of a house near the hustings, amidst the jeers and vociferations of the opposite faction.

The crowd took it all in good part, and cheered Plantagenet loudly whenever he appeared at the windows of the "Black Eagle," where he held his committee.

He was more radiant than ever, when, attended by his supporters, he addressed the free and independent electors of Rubestown for the first time. The heads of his speech, which had been prepared two or three days before, were carefully placed in the crown of his hat, which from time to time, he waved before him and consulted, whenever he lost the thread of his discourse.

Smith the brewer, who was his nominator, and Clark the lawyer, his seconder, stood by his side, and occasionally prompted him with a word or so whenever the little man, either from forgetfulness or want of breath, failed to make his meaning clear to his friends. But as a rule, Plantagenet required but little prompting. Naturally fluent in speech, the flow of electioneering language that fell from his lips was considered by his friends and sup-

porters a masterpiece of eloquence ; and the long list of benefits that he intended to obtain for the town of his adoption, should he have the honour of being returned to Parliament, would have made that unpretending little borough one of the most influential in the United Kingdom.

“Men of Rubestown,” exclaimed the enthusiastic Smith. “Is it necessary that I should ask you whom you mean to return to Parliament ? Is it a stranger, who, full of specious promises, comes and inflames your minds by representing facts for lies, and lies for facts ? Are you going to let a Radical, who would do away with all established order, represent the most loyal little borough in the world ?” [Cries of “no, no.”] “Who is the man, I would ask, most fitted to represent you ? Is it not the man who has done the most for you ? Who has spent his life in working for your interests ? You surely don’t want a man whom you have never seen before, and whom you will in all probability never see again ? You want a man who knows you, and under-

stands you ; who has your interests at heart, and whose interests are identical with your own. And here he stands ; so allow me to introduce him to you—your worthy and esteemed friend and fellow-citizen, Mr. Plantagenet Jones.” (Loud and vociferous cheers from the crowd, which continued for several minutes.)

“Look at him, now !” Jones bowing and smiling, hat in hand. “He was a man of the people once ; he rose by his own individual merit” (“What about old Bullion’s daughter, eh, Jones ?” from the opposition). “Rubestown made him what he is—and he has made Rubestown what it is !” (Great and prolonged cheering from the people.)

“We don’t want any sneaking lying Radicals here !” continued the last speaker ; “We are to a man Tories to the backbone, we Rubestownites ! We want a man who is loyal to his Queen and his country, and who will uphold the constitution in all its glory—that’s Jones” (Tremendous cheers, and an attempt at “God save the Queen,” from the

brass band.) Smith waved them into silence—"Men of Rubestown!" he exclaimed, "free and independent electors, in proposing for your candidate, my friend Mr. Plantagenet Jones, I feel I am but echoing the wish of every man amongst you."

There was a great hurrah, and waving of hats and handkerchiefs, when Smith concluded his introductory speech, which was ably seconded by his friend Clarke.—Cries of "Jones—Jones for ever!" rose from the crowd—"Bravo, old Planty—let us hear what Planty has to say for himself!"—interrupted by observations on his personal appearance, not always the most polite.

"How much for the diamonds, Jones? Where do you get your hair-dye from? What is the price of mutton in Wales? And what did you pay for that jolly white waistcoat?" mingled with jeers and laughter—hisses and groans.

At times the uproar was so great, Plantagenet fancied they would not let him speak at all—he went through the most

absurd pantomimic gestures in his endeavours to make himself heard ; waving his hat wildly in the air, and wiping the perspiration from his forehead. At any fresh attempt he made, the cheering was so vociferous, the clamour so great, he was almost breathless in trying to shout above it. At length it somewhat subsided, and he was then listened to with a marked attention ; that all the interruptions from his opponents could not effectually destroy : each concluding sentence was received with a tremendous applause ; the show of hands being taken, and an overwhelming majority declared for Plantagenet Jones. A poll was demanded, and a day fixed for the election.

The elated millionaire, now confident of success, had the large room over the bank fitted up as an elegant reception-room, for the entertainment of his particular friends and supporters. The curtains and couches were of dark blue and silver, a most sumptuous luncheon was spread,

and the gray dresses of the ladies added not a little to the splendour of the entertainment.

Outside a balcony was erected with a canopy over, of the self-same colours, and, as the sun on this occasion was agreeable enough to shine with unwonted brilliancy, the effect was both novel and striking. The ladies from their position of advantage looked down on the motley groups that thronged the streets. Whatever the uproar and riot—they were safe, the turmoil could not possibly affect them: they interchanged smiles and bows with the occupants of the various carriages, as they drove up to the polling booth, and waved their handkerchiefs to all the excited electors, whose colours proclaimed they were voting for Plantagenet Jones.

It was an eventful day for many a sturdy Rubestownite, who felt he had never done anything so important in his life before, as when, amidst the cheers and hisses of the swaying surging crowd, the braying and

discordance of the bands, and a shower of various and unpleasant missiles—such as flour, rotten eggs, potatoes, &c., he boldly gave his plumper for Plantagenet Jones.

All our old acquaintances were congregated in the banker's rooms. There had not been an election in the county for many years, and the contest was quite as exciting to the aristocracy, as to the lower orders. Any little circumstance that disturbed the monotony of Rubestown was hailed by both parties as a positive God-send, and this was an event something above the common, and destined to be remembered by all concerned for many a long day.

The fair canvassers were full of excitement as to the issue; even the stately Catherine condescended to unbend for the nonce, and, greater marvel than all, to wear Plantagenet's colours.

Lady Slade had quite recovered her jealousy about Mrs. Harrington. Sir Reginald's *sang froid* completely disarmed her, and the almost childish prattle of the

little coquette concerning her pearls, threw Lady Slade again off her guard. Beatrice's nature was so pure and unsuspecting, that nothing but the most flagrant dereliction, could have made her think ill of anyone—least of all of the woman whom she believed to be her faithful friend. It was a strange coincidence, that was all; her jealousy had been roused without a cause. In her self-accusing sweetness, she endeavoured by additional kindness to repay both her husband and Mrs. Harrington, for the unjust suspicions she had entertained concerning them.

Sir Reginald received her overtures with his usual indifference and neglect. Mrs. Harrington, on the contrary, became doubly impressive and communicative.

Rosamond Etheridge, though she dared not speak, was pained to see that the breach, whatever it was, between them, was apparently closed for the time. Better, far better, she thought, that her beloved Beatrice should suffer one terrible pang at first, than let

this female serpent coil round her heart, and sting her to death at last. But the girl was powerless, and she had a secret of her own to conceal, which at times caused her intense anxiety. She could do nothing but look at Beatrice with sad wistful eyes, that Lady Slade remembered afterwards for many a long day.

Plantagenet Jones's election was now the sole topic of conversation in Rubestown. The banker's rising fortunes were a subject of surprise and interest to every one. To quote a vulgar saying, "he was as well known as the bellman" both in town and country. He was spoken of as a man with "his head upon his shoulders," a "clever fellow," and other appropriate appellations; and his friends prophesied that a very few years more would see him in the peerage; a man who did so much for his country deserved to be rewarded. Never mind about his vulgarity. Peers of the realm were sometimes not so very particular about the Queen's English; and it is recorded of an exalted personage, now dead, who was

said to be the most perfect gentleman in Europe, that his tastes were decidedly not the most refined in the world.

Jones was a capital good fellow, never presumed on the familiarity shown him by his aristocratic acquaintances ; and it was hard indeed if my Lord Z——, or his Grace of D——, should refuse so slight a favour as walking arm-in-arm in Rubestown, or Bond Street, with the wealthy banker, who had just discounted their little bills for five thousand apiece.

Some there were, indeed, who could not be induced to treat Mr. Jones with anything but the ordinary courtesy of gentlemen, who positively declined to accept his invitations, or associate with him in any way except in the usual routine of business. But they were conceited, hair-brained fools, who thought more of their fourteen centuries of lineage, than of all the diamonds of Golconda, and who carried beneath their threadbare coats a pride sufficient to rule the world.

It was a grand mistake ! Money is the only real worth ! Will pride buy food or clothes if there is no silver in the purse ? What is the use of going into a butcher's shop and telling him your name is De Bassompierre ? Should he be an extremely ignorant man, he may be induced to trust you on the strength of your high-sounding appellation ; but the probability is, your very name will arouse his suspicions, and he will ask for a reference before he sends home the necessary sirloin of beef.

Those old Israelites were wise in their generation when they fell down and worshipped the golden calf. Deny the existence of a spiritual God, and certainly gold is the most fitting object of adoration.

"Knowledge is power." Stuff and nonsense ! It might have been when Bacon lived, but *money* is power in the nineteenth century !

Who discovers the worth of a man till he dies ? Who reaps the benefit of his mighty brain ? A splendid funeral is the

highest reward of genius that England usually bestows. Whatever can be said against us as a nation, in other respects, we *bury* our great ones well.

Money is power! No gift of God, no ancient name, can win the adulation money exacts. Money can raise the beggar from the dust, and place him side by side with the noblest in the land. Money can open with its golden key even the gates that lead to Royalty itself.

The golden calf of Rubestown fell in for its full share of the world's adoration, and never dreamt the wise ones knew he was only a calf after all.

"Here come the aborigines!" cried Mrs. Harrington, as a bevy of agricultural labourers, arm-in-arm, marched up to the hustings, preceded by a band of music playing "The Maid of Llangollen."

"True blue for ever!" laughed Sir Reginald, as the voters boldly continued their march, despite the efforts made by their opponents to prevent them.

"Just look at their rosettes! What tremendous streamers!" cried Maria Jones; "they look as proud as if they were Knights of the Garter."

"And probably are," said Lord Arthur Trelawney; "it is only a question of so much blue ribbon in either case."

"What is the state of the poll now, old fellow?" exclaimed the Baronet.

Plantagenet Jones, very red and very excited, had just entered the room.

"About seventy ahead. By Jove! Sir Reginald, but this is an awful business! I do not think anything would ever tempt me to undertake it again."

And the banker sat down, unbuttoned his coat, and mopped his shining face.

"Nonsense! You will get used to it in time. Stanley takes kindly enough to it."

"There are a great many oranges going up now," cried Rosamond Etheridge, who was watching the proceedings from the balcony.

"They may go—they will only get

squeezed," laughed Plantagenet, with an attempt at a pun. At which his friends all laughed, and Captain Vivian, who enjoyed it mightily, slapped him on the back.

The joke, however, turned out a reality, for the unfortunate Radicals were jostled, hustled, pushed, and bonneted, until they scarcely knew which side they were voting for ; and many a shout of derisive laughter burst from the crowd, as some unfortunate wight wearing the orange card and rosette, appeared in the banker's booth.

"Come, good people, let us have some champagne to keep up our spirits," exclaimed Plantagenet, suiting the action to the word, and filling up a bumper. "Miss Catherine, will you not pledge me?"

"Willingly," said the fair Catherine, who looked unusually lovely in her beautiful blue dress. "I wish you every success, Mr. Jones."

"Drink to me only with thine eyes!" ardently exclaimed the banker, laying his

hand upon his heart. "Even those lovely orbs are wearing my colours to-day."

Plantagenet's excitement, aided by the wine, produced this outburst of volubility. Catherine turned away, half smiling, half annoyed.

"Jones! Jones for ever!" arose from the multitude outside the bank.

"There, Jones, they are shouting for you; you must go and show yourself. They want you to make them a speech," cried Lord Arthur.

"They may want. I'll make no more speeches until the contest is over; I am sure they never heard a word of the last; I could scarcely hear myself."

"You should get Stanley to help you, he is a famous hand at that kind of thing," cried Mrs. Harrington.

"Don't chaff, Isabel."

"What! are you there? I thought you were asleep, and was regretting your valuable services had not been called into account."

"Asleep, indeed! a likely story, as if any

one could sleep with this confounded din going on. I make a speech ? not if I know it," laughed Stanley, good-humouredly. "I tell you what I will do, Jones ; propose a vote of thanks when it is all over."

"I shall be very sorry when it is all over," cried Maria Jones.

"Yes, why ?" It was Mrs. Harrington who was speaking now.

"Because it has been such awfully good fun, and papa is certain to be returned. Oh look, Rosamond, here are some more of our voters coming," and Maria waved her handkerchief frantically over the balcony.

"A detachment of the Blues," simpered Captain Vivian.

"To me they look more like a detachment of wild beasts," said Mrs. Harrington contemptuously ; "one never realises what the lower millions are like, except on such occasions as these."

"Jones ! Jones !" was vociferated from the crowd.

"You must really go out to them, Jones,

or they will storm the bank," cried Sir Reginald.

The excited banker gulped down his champagne and rushed out into the balcony, forgetting his hat in his hurry. His presence was the signal for a roar of applause. The brass instruments of the opposite party vainly endeavoured to drown the cheers. The mob seized hold of them, and half in fun, and half in earnest, marched them away to another part of the town, in spite of their resistance. There the discomfited musicians revenged themselves by imbibing copiously of beer. From fun the crowd got to fighting, and as the close of the poll drew nigh, it was with difficulty any voter could succeed in reaching his proper booth. The ladies became frightened, but the gentlemen assuring them it was only play, and that the police would have no difficulty in restoring order, kept them in their places, their curiosity to see the end of the contest overbalancing their fears.

At last it was all over, and Plantagenet Jones declared at the head of the poll, by an overwhelming majority.

This state of things being made known to the populace, it was the signal for another burst of applause. Plantagenet, radiant and excited, was dragged to the front of his hotel, where he had to bow and smile, and smile, till he was glad to escape into his committee-room again. But the delighted mob did not mean to stop there.

On the following day Rubestown was again *en fête*; the streets and houses were decorated with flags and banners, and the entire population were in gala dress. An enormous triumphal car, drawn by four grey horses, decorated with streamers, was conducted to the entrance of the "Black Eagle," and into it, smiling and blushing, Jones was hoisted, his supporters were going to show him in triumph to the whole town! The enthusiasm of the people knew no bounds. With his band

preceding him, playing "See the conquering Hero comes," with banners flying and bells ringing, the waving of handkerchiefs and loud huzzas, Plantagenet's triumphal procession moved slowly along. The free and independent electors, four abreast, formed a continuous stream behind him, which extended for nearly a quarter-of-a-mile, and the rear was brought up by a motley array of carriages, flies, dogcarts, and vehicles of every description, crowded with proud and excited voters, and their wives and daughters.

The various bands chartered for the occasion gave forth their most melodious airs. It was the proudest day of Plantagenet's life. The new M.P. sat in conscious pride in his gaily decorated car, bowing incessantly to the right and to the left; one hand upon his heart, the other occupied in raising his hat.

He was truly the Monarch of Moorshire, now. As he continued his progress, the delight of the populace increased, culminating at last in front of the "Black Eagle,"

where the car discharged its precious freight in safety, on the steps of the hotel. Plantagenet had hardly descended from his gilded throne, when the whole of the gorgeous fabric was seized and torn to pieces by the crowd, who set upon it as if it had been a living thing, on whose destruction they were determined. In a few moments it was all shreds and tatters, men literally fighting for the smallest piece of the car, to carry home as a perpetual relic of the eventful day.

"You must have felt very proud, Mr. Jones," said Lord Arthur, when Plantagenet's friends and supporters crowded round him to wish him joy, "when you were midway between earth and heaven, on your triumphal car."

"Proud? Not a bit of it," cried the banker, smiling. "I was thinking what an awful thing it must be to be hanged."

The rejoicings did not end here. Rubes-town, when it did a thing at all, did it properly. The growing darkness simply

varied the programme. As night drew on, bonfires, fireworks, every description of illumination were devised, in order to do the new member honour.

People gave dinner parties in their houses; and those who could not afford dinners, resorted to the still open public houses, both parties being equally satisfied, no doubt, with their way of celebrating the event. The bells of the various churches rang out merrily; everybody seemed pleased with everybody; even the rival factions, now the contest was over, were treated liberally by their former opponents, who would have broken their heads without compunction on the previous day. Altogether it might have been the accession of a crowned head, that the good people of Rubestown were celebrating, instead of the successful electioneering contest of a small country borough.

Plantagenet had paid a great price for the honour of representing Rubestown in Parliament, and they were not going to be

behind-hand in generosity. Everyone did what he could to make the holiday perfect, and rejoicing filled both the hearts and homes of the free and independent electors.

So the bells rang out—clear, joyful, melodious, over the little city and its merriment; over the moonlit river and the sloping fields, to where the feudal Towers of Bingley raised their battlemented heads in startling consciousness of newly-acquired greatness.

The windows were all aglow with light, for Plantagenet held high revel with his friends. One great object of his ambition was obtained; what would be the next? “The world comes to him who waits;” and Plantagenet Jones, banker and M.P., was content to wait; seeing farther than people gave him credit for, and guarding carefully a certain little tin box at the bank.

Men are strange beings; and I doubt whether all the honour, and the glory, and the triumph, that had come to him to-day,

gave him half the pleasure that the knowledge of possessing that little tin box did, whose key he kept so guardedly hidden away in his breast.

The bells chimed out, over Chesham woods and Chesham Court, where the Slades entertained their guests; where a pale beautiful woman moved in and out the rooms with calm and quiet step, and a little child lay asleep in his satin cot, with the blue and silver election rosettes clasped in his tiny grasp.

A spirit of universal delight seemed to pervade the atmosphere; but in one house there was sorrow, and anguish, and tears, for Rosamond Etheridge—gay, saucy, fanciful Rosamond Etheridge—had left her home, and gone, no one knew whither.

END OF VOL. II.



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